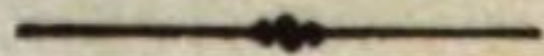


DIRECTIONS
FOR
GETTING AND KEEPING
SPIRITUAL PEACE AND COMFORT.

ABRIDGED FROM

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BAXTER'S

SPIRITUAL PEACE AND COMFORT.

It must be understood, that the case here to be resolved is not, How an unhumbled, profane sinner, that never was convinced of sin and misery, should be brought to a settled peace of conscience. But the case in hand is, 'How a sinner may attain to a settled peace of conscience, and some competent measure of the joy of the Holy Ghost, who hath been convinced of sin and misery, and long made a profession of holiness, but liveth in continual doubtings of their sincerity, and fears of God's wrath, because of an exceeding deadness of spirit, and a want of that love to God, and delight in him, and sweetness in duty, and witness of the Spirit, and communion with God, and the other like evidences which are found in the saints.'

Of my directions, the first shall be only general, and the rest more particular. And all of them I must entreat you, 1. To observe the order and method, as well as the matter; and that you would practice them in the same order as I place them. 2. And to remember that it is not only comfortable words, but it is directions for your own practice, which here I prescribe you; and therefore that it

is not the bare reading of them that will cure you ; but if you mean to have the benefit of them, you must bestow more time in practicing them, than I have done in penning them : yea, you must make it the work of your life.

Direction I. 'Get as clear a discovery as you can of the true cause of your doubts and troubles ; for if you should mistake in the cause, it would much frustrate the most excellent means for the cure.' Sometimes the cause begins in the body, and thence proceedeth to the mind ; sometimes it begins in the mind, and thence distempereth the body. Sometimes in the mind, it is most, or first from worldly crosses, and thence proceedeth to spiritual things. And of spiritual matters, sometimes it begins upon scruples or differences in religion, or points of doctrine ; sometimes and most commonly, from the sense of our own infirmities ; sometimes it is only from ordinary infirmities ; sometimes from some extraordinary decays of inward grace ; sometimes from the neglect of some weighty duty ; and sometimes from the deep wounds of some heinous, secret, or scandalous sin ; and sometimes it is merely from the fresh discovery of that which before we never did discern ; and sometimes from the violent assault of extraordinary temptations. Which of these is your own case, you must be careful to find out, and to apply the means for cure accordingly. Even of true Christians, the same means will not fit all. The difference of natures, as well as of actual cases, must be considered. One hath need of that tender handling, which would undo another ; and he again hath need of that rousing which another cannot bear.

Direct. II. 'Make as full a discovery as you can,

how much of the trouble of your mind doth arise from your melancholy and bodily distempers, and how much from discontenting afflictions in your worldly estate, or friends, or name, and according to your discovery make use of the remedy.'

For melancholy, I have by long experience found it to have so great and common a hand in the fears and troubles of mind, that I meet with not one of many, that live in great troubles and fears for any long time together; but melancholy is the main seat of them; though they feel nothing in their body, but all in their mind. Where this is the cause, usually the party is fearful of almost every thing; a word, or a sudden thought will disquiet them. Sometimes they are sad, and scarce know why: all comforts are of no continuance with them; but as soon as you have done comforting them, and they be never so well satisfied, yet the trouble returns in a few days or hours, as soon as the dark and troubled spirits return to their former force: they are still addicted to musing and solitariness, and thoughts will run in their minds, that they cannot lay them by: if it go anything far, they are almost always assaulted with temptations to blasphemy, to doubt whether there be a God, or a Christ, or the scriptures be true; or whether there be a heaven or a hell; and oft tempted to speak some blasphemous words against God; and this with such importunity, that they can hardly forbear; and oftentimes they are tempted to make away themselves. Now to those that find that melancholy is the cause of their troubles, I would give this advice. Expect not that rational, spiritual remedies, should suffice for this cure: for you may as well expect that a good sermon, or comfortable words, should cure the falling sickness, or palsy, or a broken

head, as to be a sufficient cure to your melancholy fears ; for this is as real a bodily disease as the other. Do not therefore, lay the blame on your books, friends, counsels, instructions if these troubles be not cured by words : but labor to discern truly how much of your trouble comes this way, and then fix in your mind in all your inquiries, reading, and hearing, that it is the other part of your trouble which is truly rational, and not this part of it which is from melancholy, that these means were ordained to remove. Only constant importunate prayer is a fit and special means for the curing of all.

If you would have these fears and troubles removed, apply yourself to the proper cure of melancholy. Avoid all passion of sorrow, fear, and anger, as much as you can ; and all occasions, and discontents and grief. Avoid much solitariness, and be most commonly in some cheerful company. Not that I would have you do as the foolish sinners of the world do, to drink away melancholy, and keep company with sensual, vain, and unprofitable persons, that will draw you deeper into sin, and so make your wound greater instead of healing it, and multiply your troubles when forced to look back on your sinful loss of time. But keep company with the more cheerful sort of the godly. There is no mirth like the mirth of believers, which faith doth fetch from the blood of Christ, and from the promises of the word, and from experiences of mercy, and from the serious fore-apprehensions of our everlasting blessedness. Yet sometimes it may not be amiss to confer with some that are in your own case, that you may see that your condition is not singular. For melancholy people, in such distresses, are ready to think, that never any was in the case as they are in ; or at least, never any

that were truly godly. When you hear people of the most upright lives, and that truly fear God, to have the same complaints as you have yourself, it may give you some hopes that it is not so bad as you before did imagine. However, be sure that you avoid solitariness as much as you well can. Also take heed of too deep, fixed, musing thoughts; studying and serious meditating be not duties for the deeply melancholy; you must let those alone till you are better able to perform them, lest by attempting those duties which you cannot perform, you shall utterly disable yourself from all: therefore I would advise you by all means, to shake and rouse yourself out of such musings, and suddenly to turn your thoughts away to something else. To this end, be sure that you avoid idleness and want of employment; which as it is a life not pleasing to God, so it is the opportunity for melancholy thoughts to be working, and the chiefest season for Satan to tempt you. Never let the devil find you unemployed, but see that you go cheerfully about the works of your calling, and follow it with diligence; and that time which you redeem for spiritual exercises, let it be most spent in thanksgiving, and praises, and heavenly conference.

The second part of this direction was, that you take notice how much of your disquietness may proceed from outward crosses; for it is ordinary for these to lie at the root, and bring the heart into disquiet and discontent, and then trouble for sin doth follow after. Alas, how oft have I seen verified that of the apostle; 2 Cor. vii. 10. "The sorrow of the world worketh death." How many, even godly people have I known, that through crosses in children, or in friends, or losses in estates, or wrongs from men, or perplexities that

through some unadvisedness they were cast into, or the like, have fallen into mortal disease, or into such a fixed melancholy, that some of them have gone beside themselves ; and others have lived in fears and doubting ever after, by the removal of the disquietness to their consciences ? How sad a thing is it, that we should thus add to our own ! afflictions ? And the heavier we judge the burden, the more we lay on ! As if God had not done enough, or would not sufficiently afflict us. We may more comfortably bear that which God layeth on us, than that which we immediately lay upon ourselves ! Crosses are not great or small, according to the bulk of the matter, but according chiefly to the mind of the sufferer. Or else, how could holy men “rejoice in tribulation, and be exceeding glad that they are accounted worthy to suffer for Christ ?” Reproaches, wrongs, losses, are all without you ; unless you open them the door willingly yourself, they cannot come into the heart. God hath not put the joy or grief of your heart in any other man’s power, but in your own. It is you therefore that do yourselves the greatest mischief.

Direct. III. ‘Be sure that you first lay sound apprehensions of God’s nature in your understanding, and lay them deeply.’

This is the first article of your creed, and the first part of “life eternal, to know God !” His substance is quite past human understanding ; therefore never make any attempt to reach to the knowledge of it, or to have any positive conceivings of it, for they will be all but idols, or false conceptions ; but his attributes are manifested to our understandings. Well consider, that even under the law, when God proclaims to Moses his own name,

and therein his nature, *Exod. xxxiv, 6, 7*, the first and greatest part is, "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin." And he hath sworn, "That he hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he return and live."—Think not therefore of God's mercifulness, with diminishing, extenuating thoughts, nor limit it by the bounds of our frail understandings; for the heavens are not so far above the earth, as his thoughts and ways are above ours. Still remember that you must have no low thoughts of God's goodness, but apprehend it as bearing proportion with his power. This will make God appear more amiable in your eyes, and then you will love him more readily and abundantly. If you think of God as one that is glad of all advantages against you, and delighteth in his creatures' misery, it is impossible you should love him. The love of yourselves is so deeply rooted in nature, that we cannot lay it by, nor love anything that is absolutely and directly against us. We conceive of the devil as an absolute enemy to God and man, and one that seeks our destruction, and therefore we cannot love him. And the great cause why troubled souls do love God no more, is because they represent him to themselves in an ugly, odious shape. To think of God as one that seeks and delighteth in man's ruin, 's to make him as the devil. And then what wonder if instead of loving him, and delighting in him, you tremble at the thoughts of him, and fly from him. As I have observed children, when they have seen the devil painted on the wall, in an ugly shape, they have partly feared, and partly hated it. If you do so by God in your fancy, it is not putting

the name of God on him when you have done, that will reconcile your affections to him as long as you strip him of his divine nature.

God hath given no command for duty, but what most perfectly agreeth with the nature of the object. He hath therefore bid us love God and delight in him above all, because he is above all in goodness ; even infinitely and inconceivably good ; else we could not love him above all, nor would he ever command us so to do. How gladly, and freely, and frequently do you think of your dearest friends. And if you did firmly conceive of God, as one that is ten thousand times more gracious, loving and amiable than any friend you have in the world, it would make you not only to love him above all friends, but also more freely, delightfully, and unweariedly to think of him. The fixed apprehension of God's goodness and merciful nature, would cause a fixed apprehension of the probability of your happiness, as long as you are willing to be happy in God's way. For reason will tell you, that he who is love itself, and whose goodness is equal to his almightiness, and who hath sworn, that he hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he repent and live, will not destroy a poor soul that lieth in submission at his feet, and is so far from resolved rebellion against him, that he grieveth that it is no better, and can please him no more.

These right apprehensions of God would overcome those terrors which are raised only by false apprehensions of him. And doubtless a very great part of men's causeless troubles, are raised from such misapprehensions of God. For Satan knows, that if he can bring you to think of God as a cruel tyrant and bloodthirsty man-hater, then he can drive

you from him in terror, and turn all your love and cheerful obedience into hatred and slavish fear. I say therefore again, do not only get, but also fix deep in your understanding, the highest thoughts of God's natural goodness and graciousness that you possibly can raise. For when they are at the highest, they come short ten thousand fold.

Direct. IV. 'Be sure that you deeply apprehend the gracious nature, disposition, and office, of the Mediator Jesus Christ.'

Our thoughts of God are necessarily more strange, because of our infinite distance from the Godhead; and therefore our apprehensions of God's goodness will be the less working, because less familiar. But in Christ, God is come down into our nature, and so Infinite goodness and mercy is incarnate. The man Christ Jesus is able now to save to the utmost all that come to God by him. We have a merciful High-Priest that is acquainted with our infirmities. Herein we see the will of God putting forth itself for our help in the most astonishing way that could be imagined. Here is more than merely a gracious inclination. It is an office of saving and showing mercy also that Christ hath undertaken; even "to seek and to save that which was lost;" to bring home straying souls to God; to be the great Peacemaker between God and man, to reconcile God to man, and man to God; and so to be the Head and Husband of his people. Certainly the devil strangely wrongeth poor, troubled souls in this point, that he can bring them to have such hard, suspicious thoughts of Christ, and so much to overlook the glory of mercy which so shineth in the face of the Son of Mercy itself. How can we more contradict the nature of Christ, and the Gospel description of him, than to think him a destroying hater of his

creatures, and one that watcheth for our halting, and hath more mind to hurt us than to help us? How could he have manifested more willingness to save, and more tender compassion to the souls of men, than he hath fully manifested? If twenty were ready to drown in the sea, and if one that were able to swim and fetch all out, should cast himself into the water, and offer them his help, were it not foolish ingratitude for any to say, 'I know not yet whether he be willing to help me or not;' and so to have jealous thoughts of his good-will, and so perish in refusing his help? How tenderly did Christ deal with all sorts of sinners. He professed that he "came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." "How oft would he have gathered them as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings (mark, that he would have done this for them that he cast off) and they would not?" When his disciples would have had "fire come down from heaven to consume those that refused him," he reproofs them, and tells them, "They knew not what spirit they were of." Yea, he prayeth for his crucifiers, and that on the cross, not forgetting them in the heat of his sufferings. Thus he doth by the wicked; but to those that follow him, his tenderness is unspeakable, as you would have said yourself, if you had but stood by and seen him washing his disciples' feet, and wiping them; or bidding Thomas put his finger into his side, "and be not faithless, but believing." Alas! that the Lord Jesus should come from heaven to earth, from glory into human flesh, and pass through a life of misery to a cross, and from the cross to the grave, to manifest openly to the world the abundance of his love, and the tenderness of his heart to sinners; and

that after all this we should suspect him of cruelty, or hard-heartedness or unwillingness to show mercy; and that the devil can so far delude us as to make us think of the Lamb of God as if he were a tiger or devourer!

Direct. V. The next step in right order to comfort is this: 'You must believe and consider the full sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice and ransom for all.'

If Satan would persuade you either that no ransom or sacrifice was ever given for you, or that, therefore, you have no Redeemer to trust in, and no Saviour to believe in, and no sanctuary to fly to from the wrath of God, he must first prove you either to be no lost sinner, or to be a final, impenitent unbeliever; that is, that you are dead already; or else he must delude your understanding, to make you think that Christ died not for all; and then I confess he hath a sore advantage against your faith and comfort.

Direct. VI. The next thing in order to be done is this: 'Get clear apprehensions of the freeness, fullness, and universality of the new covenant or law of grace.'

I mean the promise of remission, justification, adoption, and salvation to all, so they will believe. No man on earth is excluded in the tenor of this covenant. And therefore certainly you are not excluded; and if not excluded, then you must needs be included. Show where you are excluded if you can! You will say, 'But for all this, all men are not justified and saved.' *Ans.* True, because they will not be persuaded to accept the mercy that is freely given them.

Direct. VII. 'You must get the right understanding of the difference between general grace and

special. And between the possibility, probability, conditional certainty, and absolute certainty of your salvation. And so between the comfort on the former ground and on the latter.'

Do not begin the way to your spiritual peace by inquiring after the sincerity of your graces, and trying yourselves by signs. Let the first thing you do, be to obey the voice of the Gospel, which calleth you to accept of Christ and special mercy. "This is the record, that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life." Fix this deep in your mind, that the nature of the Gospel is first to declare to our understandings the most gracious nature, undertakings, and performances of Christ for us, which must be believed to be true : and secondly to offer this Christ with all his special mercy to every man to whom this Gospel comes, and to entreat them to accept Christ and life, which is freely given and offered to them. Remember then you are a lost sinner. For certain Christ and life in him is given and offered to you. Now your first work is, presently to accept it; not to make an unseasonable inquiry, whether Christ be yours, but to take him that he may be yours. If you were condemned, and a pardon were freely given you, on condition you would thankfully take it, and it were offered to you, and you entreated to take it, what would you do in this case? Would you spend your time and thoughts in searching whether this pardon be already yours? Or would you not presently take it that it may be yours? Or if you were ready to famish, and food were offered you, would you stand asking first, 'How shall I know that it is mine?' Or rather take and eat it, when you are sure it may be yours if you will. Remember, That your first work

is to believe, or accept an offered Saviour. You must learn to receive the comforts of universal or general grace, before you search after the comforts of special grace. I here suppose you so far sound in the doctrine of the Gospel, as neither with some on one hand, to look so much at special grace, as to deny that general grace, which is the ground of it, or presupposed to it. Nor with others, so far to look at universal mercy, as to deny special.

Suppose you are yet graceless, is it nothing to you that it is a God of infinite mercy that you have to do with, whose compassions are ten thousand times greater than your dearest friends'? is it not an exceeding comfort, that there is one of such infinite compassion as the Lord Christ, who hath assumed our nature, and is come down to seek and save that which was lost; and is more tender-hearted to poor sinners than we can possibly conceive? Yea, who hath made it his office to heal, and relieve, and restore, and reconcile. Yea, that hath himself endured such temptations as many of ours; for we have not a High-priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, without sin. "For that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted."—Heb. ii, 14–18. Have you discountenance from men? Christ had much more. Doth God seem to forsake you? So he did by Christ. Are you fain to lie on your knees crying for mercy? Why Christ, in the days of his flesh was fain to offer up "strong cries and tears, to him that was able to save him. And was heard in that he feared." It seems that Christ had distressing fears as well as you, though not sinful fears. Have you horrid temptations? Why Christ was tempted to cast himself headlong,

and to worship the devil, for worldly preferment; yea, the devil had power to carry his body up and down to the pinnacle of the temple, and the top of a mountain. If he had such power of you, would you not think yourself certainly his slave? Also, suppose that you are graceless, is it nothing that a sufficient sacrifice and ransom is given for you? This is the very foundation of all solid peace. Also, suppose you are graceless, is it nothing that God hath, under his hand and seal, made a full and free deed of gift to you and all sinners, of Christ, and with him of pardon and salvation! Almost all that I have hitherto said to you is comprised in that one text, John iii, 16: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." Though you were yet graceless, you have now this comfort, that your salvation is probable as well as possible. You are very fair for it. The terms are not hard in themselves, on which it is tendered. For Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden is light, and his commands are not grievous. Yea, this exceeding comfort there is, even for them that are graceless, that their salvation is conditionally certain, and the condition is but their own willingness. They may all have Christ and life if they will. Now I desire you in all your doubts, that you will well consider and improve this one truth and ground of comfort. Would you, in the midst of your groans and complaints and fears, take it for a small mercy, to be certain that you shall have Christ if you will? Would it not revive you and overcome your fears?

Direct. VIII. The next thing that you have to do, for building up a stable comfort, and settling

your conscience in a solid peace, is this, 'Be sure to go and keep a right understanding of the nature of saving faith.'

The Scripture is so full and plain in assuring pardon and salvation to all true believers, that if you can be sure you are a believer, you need not make any doubt of your interest in Christ, and your salvation. Seeing therefore that all the question will be, Whether you have true faith? Whether you do perform the condition of the new covenant? (for all other doubts God hath given you sufficient ground to resolve, as is said,) how much then doth it concern you to have a right understanding of the nature of this faith. It is first, a believing that the Gospel is true; and then an accepting of Christ therein offered to us, with his benefits; or a consenting that he be ours, and we be his; which is nothing but a true willingness to have an offered Christ. Remember this well, that you may make use of it, when you are in doubt of the truth of your faith. Thousands of poor souls have been in the dark, and unable to see themselves to be believers, merely for want of knowing what saving faith is. It is the understanding's belief of the truth of the Gospel, and the will's acceptance of Christ and life offered to us therein; which acceptance is but the hearty consent or willingness that he be yours, and you his. This is the faith which must justify and save you.

Wicked men are willing to have remission, justification, and freedom from hell, (for no man can be willing to be unpardoned, or to be damned;) but they are not willing to have Christ himself in that nature and office which he must be accepted; that is, as an holy head and husband to save both from the guilt and power, and all defilement and

abode of sin, and to rule them by his law, and guide them by his Spirit, and to make them happy by bringing them to God, that being without sin, they may be perfectly pleasing and amiable in his sight, and enjoy him forever. Thus is Christ offered, and thus to be accepted of all that will be saved, and thus no wicked man will accept him, (but when he ceaseth to be wicked). To cut all the rest short in a word, I say, that in this fore-described willingness or acceptance, repentance, love, thankfulness, resolution to obey, are all contained, or nearly implied, so that the heart of saving faith is this acceptance of Christ, or willingness to have him to justify, sanctify, guide, and govern you. Find but this willingness, and you find all the rest, whether you expressly see them or not. So much for that direction.

Direct. IX. Having thus far proceeded in discovering and improving the general grounds of comfort, and then in discovering the nature of faith, which gives you right to the special mercies of the covenant following it; your next work must be 'To perform this condition by actual believing.'

Your soul stands in extreme need of a Saviour. God offereth you a Saviour in the Gospel. What then have you next to do but to accept him?

When God, in the Gospel, bids you take Jesus Christ, and beseecheth you to be reconciled to him, what will you say to him? If your heart answer, 'Lord, I am willing, I will accept of Christ and be thankful,' why then the match is made between Christ and you, and the marriage-covenant is truly entered, which none can dissolve. If Christ were not first willing, he would not be the suitor and make the motion; and if he be willing, and you be willing, what can break the match? And

here I would not leave you at that loss as some do, as if there were nothing for you to do for the getting of faith; for certainly God hath prescribed you means for that end, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God preached." Rom. x, 17. Therefore see that you wait diligently on this ordinance of God. Read the Scriptures daily, and search them to see whether you may not there find that holiness is better than sin. And however some seducers may tell you, that wicked men ought not to pray, yet be sure that you lie on your knees before God, and importunately beg that he would open your eyes, and change your heart, and show you so far the evil of sin, and the want and worth of Christ and holiness, that you may be unfeignedly glad to accept his offer.

Let such also see that they avoid wicked, seducing company, and occasions of sin; and be sure that they keep company with men fearing God, especially joining with them in their holy duties. Let such be sure that they use that reason which God hath given them, to consider frequently, retiredly, seriously, of the vanity of all those things that steal away their hearts from Christ; and of the excellency of holiness, and how blessed a hope it is to have nothing in us of heart or life that is displeasing to God, but to be such as he taketh full delight in; and of the certainty and inconceivable greatness of believers' everlasting happiness.

Direct. X. When you have gone thus far, your soul is safe, and you are past your greatest dangers, though yet you are not past your fears; your next work therefore for peace and comfort is this; 'To review and take notice of your own faith and thence to gather assurance of the certainty of your justification, and adoption, and right to glory.'

See that you do not content yourself with the forementioned general comforts, without looking after assurance and special comforts. See that you dream not of finding assurance and special comfort from mere general grounds. For men to conclude that they shall certainly be saved, merely because God is merciful, or Christ is tender-hearted to sinners, and would not that any should perish, but all should come to repentance; or because God delights not in the death of him that dieth, but rather that he repent and live; or because Christ died for them; or because God hath given Christ and life in the Gospel to all, on condition of believing; these are all but mere delusions. It is the Spirit dwelling in us that is the witness or proof that we are God's sons; for he that hath not his Spirit is none of his. And the Spirit is not discerned by us in its essence, but in its workings; and therefore to discern these workings, is to discern the Spirit, and these workings are marks that we speak of: so that the Spirit witnesseth our sonship, as a reasonable soul witnesseth that you are a man and not a beast. You find by the acts of reason, that you have a reasonable soul, and then you know, that having a reasonable soul, you certainly are a man. So you find by the works or fruits of the Spirit, that you have the Spirit (that is, by marks; and Paul enumerates the fruits of the Spirit to that end,) and then by finding that you have the Spirit you may certainly know that you are the child of God. Or (to speak more plainly,) the spirit witnesses first and principally, by giving us those graces and workings which are our marks; and then, secondly by helping us to find and feel those workings or marks in ourselves; and then,

lastly, by raising comforts in the soul upon that discovery.

Direct. XI. In the trial of your state, 'Be sure that you make use of infallible signs of sincerity, and take not those for certain which are not.'

Are you heartily willing to take God for your portion? And had you rather live with him in glory in his favor and fullest love, with a soul perfectly cleansed from all sin, and never more to offend him, rejoicing with his saints in his everlasting praises, than to enjoy the delights of the flesh on earth, in a way of sin and without the favor of God? Are you heartily willing to take Jesus Christ as he is offered in the Gospel; that is, to be your only Saviour, and Lord, to give you pardon by his bloodshed, and to sanctify you by his word and Spirit, and to govern you by his laws?

You must know that his laws reach both to heart and outward actions. That they command a holy, spiritual, heavenly life. That they command things so cross and unpleasing to the flesh, that the flesh will be still murmuring and starving against obedience. Particularly, they command things quite cross to the inclinations of the flesh; as to forgive wrongs, to love enemies, to forbear malice and revenge, to restrain and mortify lust and passion, to abhor and mortify pride, and be low in our own eyes, and humble and meek in spirit. They command things that cross the interest of the flesh and its inclination both together; I mean, which will deprive it of its enjoyments, and bring it to some suffering? As to perform duties even when they lay us open to disgrace and shame, and reproach in the world; and to deny our credit, rather than forsake Christ or our duty. To obey Christ in doing what he commandeth us, though it would

hazard or certainly lose our wealth, friends, liberty and life itself; forsaking all rather than to forsake him; to give to the poor, and other good uses, and that liberally, according to our abilities. To deny the flesh all forbidden pleasures, and make not provisions to satisfy its lusts, but to crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts thereof; and in this combat to hold on to the end, and to overcome. These are the laws of Christ, which you must know, before you can determine whether you are indeed unfeignedly willing to obey them. Put therefore these further questions to yourself, for the trial of your willingness to be ruled by Christ according to his laws.

Are you heartily willing to live in the performance of those holy and spiritual duties of heart and life, which God hath absolutely commanded you? and are you heartily sorry that you perform them no better? with no more cheerfulness, delight, success, and constancy?

Are you so thoroughly convinced of the worth of everlasting happiness, and the intolerableness of everlasting misery, and the truth of both; and of the sovereignty of God the Father, and Christ the Redeemer, and your many engagements to him; and of the necessity and good of obeying, and the evil of sinning, that you are truly willing, that is, have a settled resolution to cleave to Christ, and obey him in the dearest, most disgraceful, painful, hazardous, flesh-displeasing duties; even though it should cost you the loss of all your worldly enjoyments, and your life? Doth this willingness or resolution already so far prevail in your heart and life, against all the interest and temptations of the world, the devil, and your flesh, that you do ordinarily practice the most strict and holy, the most

self-denying, costly, and hazardous duties that you know God requireth of you, and do heartily strive against all known sin, and overcome all gross sins, and when you fall under any prevailing temptation, do rise again by repentance, and begging pardon of God, through the blood of Christ, do resolve to watch and resist more carefully for the time to come? In these five marks is expressed the Gospel-description of a true Christian.

Among all duties, I think the soul is naturally most backward to these following: To secret prayer, because it is spiritual, and requires great reverence, and hath nothing of external pomp or form to take us up with, and consisteth not much in the exercise of common gifts, but in the exercise of special grace, and the breathings of the Spirit, and searchings, pantings, and strivings of a gracious soul toward God. To serious meditation also is the soul very backward; also to the duty of faithful dealing with each other's souls, in secret reproof and exhortation, plainly (though lovingly) to tell each other of our sins and danger, to this the heart is usually very backward; partly through a sinful bashfulness, partly for want of more believing, lively apprehensions of our duty, and our brother's danger, and partly because we are loth to displease men and lose their favor, it being grown so common for men to fall out with those (if not hate them) that deal plainly and faithfully with them. Also to take reproof, as well as to give it, the heart is very backward. Even godly men, through the sad remainders of their sinfulness, do too commonly frown, and snarl, and retort our reproofs, and study presently how to excuse themselves, and put it by, or how to charge us with something that may stop our mouths, and

make the reprover seem as bad as themselves. Though they dare not tread our reproofs under feet, and turn again, and all to rend us, yet they oft show the remnants of a dogged nature, though when they review their ways it costs them sorrow. We must sugar and butter our words, and make them liker to stroking than striking, liker an approving than a reproving them, liker a flattery than faithful dealing, and yet when we have all done, they go down very hardly, and that but half way, even with many godly people when they are under a temptation. The like may be said of all those duties which do pinch upon our credit or profit, or tend to disgrace us, or impoverish us in the world; as the confessing of a disgraceful fault; the free giving to the poor or sacred uses, according to our estates; the parting with our own right or gain for peace; the patient suffering of wrong, and forgiving it heartily, and loving bitter, abusive enemies, especially the running upon the stream of men's displeasure, and incurring the danger of being utterly undone in our worldly state (especially if men be rich, who do therefore as hardly get to heaven as a camel through a needle's eye): and above all, the laying down of our lives for Christ. It cannot be expected, that godly men should perform all these with perfect willingness; the flesh will play its part, in pleading its own cause, and will strive hard to maintain its own interests. O the shifts, the subtle arguments, or at least the clamorous and importunate contradictions that all these duties will meet with in the best, so far as they are renewed, and their graces weak! So that you may well hence conclude that you are a sinner, but you may not conclude that

you are graceless, because of a backwardness and some unwillingness to duty.

Observe further, that I add your actual performance of duty ; because true hearty willingness will show itself in actions and endeavors. It is but dissembling, if I should say I am willing to perform the strictest, holiest duties, and yet do not perform them ; to say I am willing to pray, and pray not ; or to give to the poor, and yet give not ; or to perform the most self-denying costly duties, and yet when it should come to the practice, I will not be persuaded or drawn to them ; I will not confess a disgraceful sin, nor further a good cause to my danger, cost or trouble ; nor reprove, nor submit to reproof, nor turn from the way of temptations or the like. Action must discover true willingness. The son that said to his father, " I go, sir," but went not to labor in the vineyard, was not accepted or justified. If therefore you are in doubt whether your willingness be sincere, inquire into your practice, and performance. God commandeth you to pray, to instruct your family, to be merciful to the poor, to forgive those that wrong you, etc. The flesh and the devil persuade you from these. Do you perform them, or do you not? Though you may do it with backwardness and dullness, and weakness, yet do you do it? And desire you could do it better, and lament your misdoing it? And endeavor to do it better than you have formerly done? This shows then that the Spirit prevaieth, though the flesh do contradict it.

If your resolution at present be hearty, you ought not to vex and disquiet your mind, with doubtful tormenting fears what you should do, if you be put to it to forsake all, and suffer death for Christ, for he hath promised to lay no more on us than we

can bear, but with the temptation will make us a way to come forth. Much less is it lawful for men to feign and suppose such calamities to themselves, as God doth never try men by, and then to ask themselves, 'Can I bear these for Christ?' And so to try themselves on false and dangerous grounds. Some use to be troubled, lest if they were put to long and exquisite torments for Christ, they should renounce him. One saith, 'I cannot endure the torments of hell for Christ;' another saith, 'Could I endure to be roasted or torn in pieces so many weeks or days together?' Or, 'Could I endure to die so many times over?' These are foolish, sinful questions, which Christ never desired you to put to yourselves. He never tries men's faith in this manner. Tormentors cannot go beyond his will. Nay, it is but very few he tries by death, and fewer by an extreme, tormenting death.

Are you not unfeignedly willing to have Christ on the terms that he is offered? Are you not willing to be more holy? And beg of him to make you so? Would you not be glad if your soul were more perfectly sanctified, and rid of that body of sin, though it were to the smart and displeasing of your flesh? Are you not willing to wait on God, in the use of his ordinances, in that poor weak measure as you are able to perform them? Durst you, or would you quit your part in God, heaven, Christ, and forsake the way of holiness, and do as the profane world doth, though it were to please your flesh, or save your state or life? Do you not daily strive against the flesh, and keep it under, and deny its desires? Do you not deny the world when it would hinder you from works of mercy, or public good, according to your ability? Is it not the grief of your soul when you fall, and your

greatest trouble that you cannot walk more obediently, innocently and fruitfully? And do you not after sinning resolve to be more watchful for the time to come? Are you not resolved to stick to Christ and his holy laws and ways, whatever changes or dangers come, and rather to forsake friends and all that you have, than to forsake him? Yet in a godly jealousy and distrust of your own heart, do renounce your own strength, and resolve to do this only in the strength of Christ, and therefore daily beg it of him? Is it not your daily care and business to please God and do his will, and avoid sinning in your weak measure? I hope that all this is so, and your own case; which, if it be, you have infallible evidences, and want but the sight and comfort of them; you have the true grounds for assurance, though you want assurance itself; your chief danger is over, though your trouble remain.

Direct. XII. The next rule for your direction for the right settling of your peace is this. 'You must know, that assurance of justification, adoption and right of salvation cannot be gathered from the smallest degree of saving grace.'

Understand, that I speak of God's ordinary working by means, not denying but God may, by a voice from heaven, or an angel, or other supernatural revelation, bestow assurance on whom he pleaseth. By the smallest degree of grace, I mean of faith, love, obedience, and those saving graces whose acts are the condition of our salvation. This much I can tell, that the least degree of grace that is saving, doth determine the soul for God and Christ, against the world and flesh that stand as competitors, and so where Christ's interest prevaieth in the least measure, there is the least measure of

saving grace. As when you are weighing two things in the balance, and at last make it so near even weight, that one end is turned, and no more. so when you are considering, whether to be for Christ, or for the flesh and the world, and your will is but even a very little determined to Christ, and preferreth him; this is the least measure of saving grace. But then how a poor soul should discern this prevalent choice and determination of itself is all the question. For there is nothing more easy and common than for men to think verily, that they prefer Christ above the creature, as long as no temptation doth assault them, nor sensual objects stand up in any considerable strength to entice them. Nay, wicked men do truly, oftentimes, purpose to obey Christ before the flesh, and to take him for their Lord, merely in the general, when they do not know or consider the quality of his laws; that they are so strict and spiritual, and contrary to the flesh, and hazardous to their worldly hopes and seeming happiness. But when it comes to particulars, and God saith, Now deny thyself, and thy friend, and thy goods, and thy life for my sake; alas, it was never his resolution to do it; nor will he be persuaded to it. So that it is evident that it is no true, saving resolution or willingness, which prevaieth not for actual obedience. Now here comes in the unresolvable doubt, What is the least measure of obedience, that will prove a man truly willing and resolved, or to have truly accepted of Christ for his Lord? This obedience lieth in performing what is commanded, and avoiding what is forbidden. Now it is too certain, that every true believer is guilty of a frequent neglect of duty, yea, of known duty. We know we should love God more abundantly, and delight in him, and meditate

more on him, and pray more oft and earnestly than we do, and instruct our families more diligently, and speak against sin more boldly, and admonish our neighbors more faithfully, with many the like. Nay, many a true Christian, in time of temptation, hath been drawn to omit secret prayer or family duties, almost wholly for a certain space of time; yea, and perhaps to be so corrupted in his judgment for a time as to think he doth well in it, as also in forbearing praising God by psalms, receiving the sacraments, and communicating with the Church, hearing the word publicly, etc., and perhaps may not only omit relieving the poor for a time, but excuse it. Now what man can punctually determine just how often a true Christian may be guilty of any such omission? and just how long he may continue it? and what the duties be which he may possibly so omit, and what not? So also in sins of commission. Alas, what sins did Noah, Lot, David, Solomon, Asa, Peter, etc. commit!

Direct. XIII. From the last mentioned observation, there is one plain conseqtary arising, which I think you may do well to note by the way, viz: 'That according to God's ordinary way of giving grace, it cannot be expected that Christians should be able to know the very time of their first receiving or acting true saving grace, or just when they were pardoned, justified, adopted, and put into a state of salvation.'

Christ likeneth God's kingdom of grace to a grain of mustard-seed, which is at the first, the least of all seeds, but after cometh to a tree: and to a little leaven, which leaveneth the whole lump. The scripture oft calleth such young beginners, babes, children, novices, etc. We are all commanded to grow in grace; which implieth, that we have our

smallest measure at the first. Heb. v, 12, sheweth that strength of grace should be according to time and means. Common experience is an invincible argument for this. Men are at a distance from Christ, when he first calleth them to come to him; and many steps they have toward him before they reach to him. I here speak only of God's ordinary way of giving grace; for I doubt not but in some, God may give a higher degree of grace at the first day of conversion, than some others do attain in many years.

But this is not the ordinary course. Ordinarily convictions lie long on the soul before they come to a true conversion. Conscience is wounded, and smarting long, and long grudging against our sinful and negligent courses, and telling us of the necessity of Christ and a holy life, before we sincerely obey conscience, and give ourselves up to Christ. We seldom yield to the first conviction or persuasion. The flesh hath usually too long time given it to plead its own cause, and to say to the soul, 'Wilt thou forsake all thy pleasure and merry company, and courses? Wilt thou beggar thyself? or make thyself a scorn or mocking-stock to the world? Art thou ever able to hold out in so strict a course? and to be undone? and to forsake all, and lay down thy life for Christ? Is it not better to venture thyself in the same way as thou hast gone in, as well as others do, and as so many of thy forefathers have done before thee?' Under such sinful deliberations as these we usually continue long before we fully resolve; and many demurs and delays we make before we conclude to take Christ on the terms that he is offered to us. Now I make no doubt but most or many christians can remember how and when God stirred their

consciences, and wakened them from their security, and made them look about them, and roused them out of their natural lethargy. Some can tell what sermon first did it; others can remember by what degrees and steps God was doing it long. The ordinary way appointed by God for the doing of it first, is the instruction of parents. And if this be God's first great means, then doubtless he will ordinarily bless his own means here, as well as in the preaching of the word.

From all this I would have you learn this lesson, That you ought not trouble yourself with fears and doubts, lest you are not truly regenerate, because you know not the sermon or the very time and manner of your conversion; but find that you have grace, and then, though you know not just the time or manner of your receiving it, yet you may nevertheless be assured of salvation by it. Search therefore what you are, and how your will is disposed, and resolved, and how your life is ordered, rather than to know how you became such.

Direct. XIV. Yet further I would have you to understand this: 'That as the least measure of saving grace is ordinarily undiscernible from the greatest measure of common grace, (notwithstanding the greatness of the change that it makes) so a measure somewhat greater is so hardly discernible, that it seldom brings assurance: and therefore it is only the stronger Christians that attain assurance ordinarily; even those who have a great degree of faith and love, and keep them much in exercise, and are very watchful and careful in obedience: and consequently (most Christians being of the weaker sort) it is but few that do attain to assurance of their justification and salvation.'

Here are two or three points which I would have

you distinctly to observe, 1. That it is only a greater measure of grace that will ordinarily afford assurance. 2. That therefore it is only the stronger, and holier, and more obedient sort of Christians that usually reach to a certainty of salvation. 3. That few Christians do reach to a strong or high degree of grace. 4. And therefore it is but few Christians that reach to assurance.

He that will attain to a certainty of salvation, must have a large measure of grace to be discerned. He must have that grace much in action, and lively action; for it is not mere habits that are discernible. He must have a clear understanding to be acquainted with the nature of spiritual things; to know what is a sound evidence, and how to follow the search, and how to repel particular temptations. He must have a good acquaintance and familiarity with his own heart, and to that end must be much at home, and be used sometimes to a diligent observation of his heart and ways. He must be in a good measure acquainted with, and a conqueror of contradicting temptations. He must have some competent cure of the deceitfulness of the heart, and it must be brought to an open, plain, ingenuous frame, willing to know the worst of itself. He must have some cure of that ordinary confusion and tumultuous disorder that is in the thought and affections of men, and get things into an order in his mind. He must be a man of diligence, resolution, and unwearied patience, that will resolvedly set on the work of self-examination, and painfully watch in it, and constantly follow it from time to time till he attain a certainty. He must be one that is very fearful of sinning, and careful in close obedient walking with God, and much in sincere and spiritual duty, that he keep not conscience still in accusing and con-

demning him, and God still offended with him, and his wounds fresh bleeding, and his soul still smarting. He must be a man of much fixedness and constancy of mind, and not of the ordinary mutability of mankind; that so he may not by remitting his zeal and diligence, lose the sight of his evidences, nor by leaving open his soul to an alteration by every new intruding thought and temptation, let go his assurance as soon as he attaineth it.

And then do I need to say any more to the confirmation of the third point, That few Christians reach this measure of grace? Oh! that it were not as clear as the light, and as discernible as the earth under our feet, that most true Christians are weaklings, and of the lower forms in the school of Christ? Alas, how ignorant are most of the best, how little love, or faith, or zeal, or heavenly-mindedness, or delight in God have they? How unacquainted with the way of self-examination? And how backward to it? And how dull and careless in it? Doing it by the halves, as Laban searched Rachel's tent? How easily put off with an excuse? How little acquainted with their own hearts? Or with satan's temptations and ways of deceiving? How much deceitfulness remaineth in their hearts? How confused are their minds? And what distractions and tumults are there in their thoughts? How bold are they in sinning? And how little tenderness of conscience, and care of obeying have they? How frequently do they wound conscience, provoke God, and obscure their evidences? And how mutable their apprehensions? And how soon do they lose that assurance which they once attained? And upon every occasion quite lose the sight of their evidences? Yea, and remit their actual resolutions, and so lose much of the

evidence itself? Is not this the common case of godly people? Oh! that we could truly deny it. Let their lives be witness, let the visible neglects, worldliness, pride, impatience of plain reproof, remissness of zeal, dullness and customariness in duty, strangeness to God, unwillingness to secret prayer and meditation, unacquaintedness with the Spirit's operations and joys, their unpeaceableness one with another, and their too frequent blemishing the glory of their holy profession by the unevenness of their walking, let all these witness, whether the school of Christ have not most children in it; and how few of those are fit to begin here the works of their priestly office, which they must live in forever, in the high and joyful praises of God, and of the Lamb, who hath redeemed them by his blood, and made them kings and priests to God, that they may reign with him forever. I am content to stand the judgment of all humble, self-knowing Christians, whether this be not true of most of themselves; and for those that deny it, I will stand to the judgment of their godly neighbors, who perhaps know them better than they know themselves.

And then this being all so, the fourth is undeniable, That it is but very few Christians that reach to assurance of salvation. The constant experience of the greatest part of believers tells us that certainty of salvation is very rare. Even of those that live comfortably and in peace of conscience, yet very few of them do attain to a certainty. For my part, it is known that God in undeserved mercy hath given me long the society of a great number of godly people, and great interest in them, and privacy with them, and opportunity to know their minds, and this in many places (my station by

providence having been oft removed); and I must needs profess, that of all these I have met with few, yea very few indeed, that if I seriously and privately asked them, 'Are you certain that you are a true believer, and so are justified, and shall be saved,' durst say to me, 'I am certain of it.'

Now what is the use that I would have you make of this? Why it is this. If assurance of sincerity and justification (much more of salvation) be so rare among true Christians, then you have no cause to think that the want of it proveth you to be no Christian. You see then that you need not be always in disquiet when you want assurance. For else how disquiet a life should most Christians live!

Direct. XV. Yea thus much more I would here inform you of, 'That many holy, watchful and obedient Christians are yet uncertain of their salvation, even then when they are certain of their justification and sanctification; and that because they are uncertain of their perseverance and overcoming; for a man's certainty of his salvation can be no stronger than is his certainty of enduring to the end and overcoming.'

If a man have the fullest certainty in the world that he is God's child, yet if he be uncertain whether he shall so continue to the end, it is impossible that he should have a certainty of his salvation, for it is he only that endureth to the end that shall be saved.

Now that many eminent Christians of great knowledge, and much zeal and obedience, are uncertain of their perseverance is proved by two infallible arguments. 1. By experience: if any should be so censorious as to think that none of all those nations and churches abroad, that deny the doctrine of certain perseverance of all believers

have any strong Christians among them, yet we have had the knowledge of such at home. 2. Beside the difficulty of the subject is a clear argument that a strong Christian may be uncertain of it. God hath made all those points plain in Scripture, which must be believed as of necessity to salvation; but the certainty of all believers' perseverance, is not a point of flat necessity to salvation to be believed. Otherwise it would be a hard matter to prove that any considerable number were ever saved till of late; or are yet saved, but in a very few countries. It is a point that the churches never did put into their creed, where they summed up those points that they held necessary to salvation. There are a great number of texts of Scripture, which seeming to intimate the contrary, do make the point of great difficulty to many of the wisest; and those texts that are for it, are not so express as fully to satisfy them.

Direct. XVI. The next thing which I would have you learn is this, 'That there are several grounds of the great probability of our salvation, beside the general grounds mentioned in the beginning: and by the knowledge of these, without any further assurance, a Christian may live in much peace and comfort, and in delightful, desirous thoughts of the glory to come. And therefore the next work which you have to do, is to discover those probabilities of your sincerity and your salvation, and then to receive the peace and comfort which they may afford you, before you can expect assurance in itself.'

Some kind of probability you may gather by comparing yourself with others. Though this way be but delusory to unregenerate men, whose confidence is plainly contradicted by the Scriptures,

yet may it be lawful and useful to a miserable soul that is willing to obey and wait on God: I mean to consider, that if such as you should perish how few people would God have in the world? Consider first in how narrow a compass the church was confined before Christ's coming in the flesh; how carnal and corrupt even that visible church then was; and even at this day the most learned do compute, that if you divide the world into thirty parts, nineteen of them are heathenish idolaters, six of them are Mahometans, and only five of them are Christians. And of these five that are Christians, how great a part are of the Ethiopian, Greek and Popish churches? So ignorant, rude, and superstitious, and erroneous that salvation cannot be imagined to be near so easy or ordinary with them as with us: and of the reformed churches, commonly called Protestants, how small is the number? And even among these, what a number are grossly ignorant and profane? And of those that profess more knowledge and zeal, how many are grossly erroneous, schismatical and scandalous? How exceeding small a number is left, then, that are such as you? I know this is no assuring argument, but I know withal, that Christ died not in vain, but he will see the fruit of his sufferings to the satisfaction of his soul; and the God of mercy, who is a lover of mankind, will have a multitude innumerable of his saved ones in the earth.

But your strongest probabilities are from the consideration of the work of God upon your souls, and the present frame and inclination of your soul to God. You dare not give up your hopes of heaven for all the world. You would not part with Christ, and say, 'Let him go,' for all the pleasures

of sin, or treasures of the earth. If you had, (as you have) an offer of God, Christ, grace, and glory on one side, and worldly prosperity in sin on the other side, you would choose God, and let go the other. You dare not, you would not give over praying, hearing, reading, and Christian company, and give up yourself to worldly, fleshly pleasures; yet you are not assured of salvation, because you find not that delight and life in duty, and that witness of the Spirit, and that communion with God, nor that tenderness of heart as you desire. It is well that you desire them; but though you be not certain of salvation, do you not see a great likelihood, a probability, in all this? Is not your heart raised to a hope, that yet God is merciful to you, and means you good?

The second thing that I am to show you, is, that there may much spiritual comfort and peace of conscience be enjoyed without any certainty of salvation. Your horse or dog know not how you will use them certainly; yet will they lovingly follow you, and put their heads to your hand, and trust you with their lives without fear, and love to be in your company, because they have found you kind to them, and have tried that you do them no hurt, but good: yea, though you do strike them sometimes, yet they find that they have their food from you, and your favor doth sustain them. Yea, your little children have no certainty how you will use them, and yet finding that you have always used them kindly, and expressed love to them, though you whip them sometimes, yet are glad of your company, and desire to be in your lap, and can trust themselves in your hands, without tormenting themselves with such doubts as these, 'I am uncertain how my mother will use me, whether

she will wound me, or kill me, or turn me out of doors, and let me perish.' Nature persuades us not to be too distrustful of those that have always befriended us, and especially whose nature is merciful and compassionate; nor to be too suspicious of evil from them that have always done us good. Every man knows that the good will do good, and the evil will do you evil; and accordingly we expect that they should do to us. Naturally, we all fear a toad, a serpent, an adder, a mad dog, a wicked man, a madman, a cruel, blood-thirsty tyrant, and the devil. But no one fears a dove, a lamb, a good man, a merciful, compassionate governor, except only the rebels or notorious offenders, that know he is bound in justice to destroy or punish them. And none should fear distrustfully the wrath of a gracious God, but they who will not submit to his mercy, and will not have Christ to reign over them, and therefore may know that he is bound in justice, if they come not in, to destroy them. But for you that would be obedient and reformed, and are troubled that you are no better, and beg of God to make you better, and have no sin but what you would be glad to be rid of, may not you, at least, see a strong probability that it shall go well with you? Oh! make use therefore of this probability; and if you have but hopes that God will do you good, rejoice in those hopes till you can come to rejoice in assurance.

Direct. XVII. My next advice to you is this, 'For the strengthening your apprehensions of the probability of your salvation, gather up, and improve all your choicest experiences of God's will and mercy to you; and observe also the experiments of others in the same kind.'

We do God and ourselves a great deal of wrong

by forgetting, neglecting, and not improving our experiences. I would this truth were well learned by believers. You are in sickness, and troubles, and dangers, and pinching straits, in fears and anguish of mind: in this case you cry to God for help, and he doth in such a manner deliver you as silenceth your distrust, and convinceth you of his love; at least, of his readiness to do you good. What a wrong is it now to God and yourself, to forget this presently, and in the next temptation to receive no strengthening by the consideration of it. Hath it not been thus oft with you? Have not mercies come so seasonably, so unexpectedly, either by small means, or the means themselves unexpectedly raised up; without your designing or effecting; and plainly in answer to prayers, that they have brought conviction along with them; and you have seen the name of God engraven on them?

And you may make great use also of the experiences of others. Is it not a great satisfaction to hear twenty, or forty, or a hundred Christians, of the most godly lives, to make the very same complaints as you do yourself? The very same complaints have I heard from as many. By this you may see your case is not singular, but the ordinary case of the tenderest consciences, and of many that walk uprightly with God. And also is it not a great help to you to hear other Christians tell how they have come into those troubles, and how they have got out of them? What hurt them? And what helped them? And how God dealt with them, while they lay under them? How desirous are diseased persons to talk with others that have had the same disease? And to hear them tell how it took them, and how it held them, and especially what cured them? Beside, it will give you much

stronger hopes of cure and recovery to peace of conscience, when you hear of so many that have been cured of the same disease. Moreover, is it not a reviving thing, to hear Christians open the goodness of the Lord? And that in particular, as upon experience they have found him to their own souls? To hear them tell you of such notable discoveries of God's special providence and care of his people, as may repel all temptations to atheism and unbelief? To hear them give you their frequent and full experiences of God's hearing, and answering their prayers, and helping them in their distresses?

For my own part, I do soberly and seriously profess to you, that the experiences I have had of God's special providences, and fatherly care, and especially of his hearing prayers, have been so strange and great, and exceeding numerous, that they have done very much to the quieting of my spirit, and the persuading of my soul of God's love to me, and the silencing and shaming of my unbelieving heart, and especially for the conquering of all temptations that lead to atheism or infidelity, to the denying of special providence, or of the verity of the gospel, or of the necessity of holy prayer and worshiping of God. I often pity the poor seduced infidels of this age, that deny Scripture and Christ himself, and doubt of the usefulness of prayer and holy worship; and I wish that they had but the experiences that I have had. Truly I have once or twice had motions in my mind to have publicly and freely communicated my experiences in a relation of the more observable passages of my life; but I found that I was not able to do it to God's praise, as was meet, without a show of ostentation or vanity, and therefore I forbore.

Direct. XVIII. Next, that you may yet further understand the true nature of assurance, faith, doubting and desperation, I would have you observe this, 'That God doth not command every man, nor properly any man, ordinarily, by his word, to believe that his sins are forgiven, and himself is justified, adopted, and shall be saved. But he hath prescribed a way by which they may attain to assurance of these, in which way it is men's duty to seek it.'

Indeed all men are bound to apply Christ and the promise to themselves. But that application consisteth in a belief that this promise is true, as belonging to all, and so to me, and then in acceptance of Christ and his benefits as an offered gift; and after this, in trusting on him for the full performance of this promise. Hence, therefore, you may best see what unbelief and desperation are, and how far men may charge themselves with them. When you doubt whether the promise be true, or when you refuse to accept Christ and his benefits offered in it, and consequently to trust him as one that is able and willing to save you, if you do assent to his truth, and accept him, this is unbelief. But if you do believe the truth of the Gospel, and are heartily willing to accept Christ as offered in it, and only doubt whether your belief and acceptance of him be sincere, and so whether you shall be saved; this is not unbelief, but ignorance of your own sincerity and its consequents. If a friend do promise to give you a hundred pounds, on condition that you thankfully accept it: if you now do believe him, and do thankfully accept it; but yet through some vain scruple shall think, my thankfulness is so small, that it is not sincere, and therefore I doubt I do not perform his condi-

tion, and so shall never have the gift; in this case now you do believe your friend, and you do not distrust him properly; but you distrust yourself that you perform the condition; and this hindereth the exercise of that confidence in your friend which is habitually and virtually in you.

Now if you begin to distrust whether God will make good his promise or no, either thinking that it is not true, or he is not able, or hath changed his mind since the making of it, and on these grounds you let go your hopes, this is despair. If because that Christ seems to delay his coming, we should say, I have waited in hope till now, but now I am out of hope that ever Christ will come to judge the world, and glorify believers, I will expect it no longer; this is despair. If you do continue to believe the truth of the Gospel, and particularly of Christ's coming and glorifying his saints, and yet you think he will not glorify you, because you think that you are not a true believer or saint; this is not desperation in the proper sense. In the forementioned example, if your friend promise to give you a hundred pounds on condition of your thankful acceptance, and promiset^h to come at such an hour and bring it you: if now you stay till the hour be almost come, and then say, 'I am out of hope of his coming now; he hath broken his word;' this is properly a despair in your friend. But if you only think that you have overstaid the time, and that it is past, and therefore you shall not have the gift, this may be called a despair of the event, and a despair in yourself, but not properly a despair of your friend; only the act of hoping in God is hindered, as is said. So it is in our present case.

And for my part, I am persuaded that it is only

this proper despair in God, which is the damnable desperation, which is threatened in the Scripture, and not the former. And that if a poor soul should go out of this world without any actual hope of his own salvation, merely because he thinks that he is no true believer, that this soul may be saved, and prove a true believer for all this. Alas! the great sin that God threateneth is our distrust of his faithfulness, and not the doubting of our own sincerity and distrust of ourselves. We have great reason to be very jealous of our own hearts, as knowing them to be deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know them? But we have no reason to be jealous of God. Where find you in Scripture that any is condemned for hard thoughts of themselves, or for not knowing themselves to have true grace, and for thinking they had none?

Do not put the name of unbelief upon all your fears of God's displeasure. Much less should you presently conclude that you have no faith, and that you cannot believe, because of these fears. You may have much faith in the midst of these fears; and God may make them preservers of your faith, by quickening you up to those means that must maintain it, and by keeping you from those evils that would be as a worm at the root of it, and eat out its precious strength and life. Security is no friend to faith, but a more deadly enemy than fear itself.

Direct. XIX. Further understand, 'That those few who do attain to assurance, have it not either perfectly or constantly (for the most part) but mixed with imperfection, and oft clouded and interrupted.'

That measure of assurance which godly men

do partake of, hath here its many sad interruptions, in the most. Upon the prevalency of temptations and the hidings of God's face, their souls are oft left in a state of sadness, that were but lately in the arms of Christ. How fully might this be proved from the examples of Job, David, Jeremy, and others in Scripture? And much more abundantly by the daily complaints and examples of the best of God's people now living among us. Seeing then that best have such storms and sad interruptions, do not you wonder or think your case strange if it be so with you? Would you speed better than the best? Long for heaven then, where only is joy without sorrow, and everlasting rest without interruption.

Direct. XX. Let me also give you this warning, 'That you must never expect so much assurance on earth, as shall set you above the possibility of the loss of heaven; or above all apprehensions of real danger of your miscarrying.'

I entreat you never to expect such an assurance as shall extinguish all your apprehensions of danger. He that sees not the danger is nearest it, and likely to fall into it. Only he that seeth and apprehendeth it, is likely to avoid it. He that seeth no danger of falling away, is in greatest danger of it. Only see that you apprehend not your danger to be greater than it is; nor so apprehend it as to increase it, by driving you from Christ, but as to prevent it by driving you to him. Entertain not fancies and dreams of danger, instead of right apprehensions. Apprehend your happiness and grounds of hope and comfort, and safety in Christ, and let these quite exceed your apprehensions of the danger.

A king having many subjects and sons, which

are all beyond sea, or beyond some river, they must needs be brought over to him before they can live or reign with him. The river is frozen over at the sides, till it come almost to the middle. The foolish children are all playing on the ice, where a deceiving enemy enticeth them to play on till they come to the deep, where they drop in one by one and perish. The eldest son, who is with the father on the other side, undertaketh to cast himself into the water, and swim to the further side, and break the ice, and swim back with them all that will come with him and hold him. The father bids him, 'Bring all my subjects with you, if they will come and hold by you; but be sure you fail not to bring my sons.' This is resolved on; the prince casteth himself into the water, and swimmeth to the further side. He maketh a way through the ice, and offereth all of them his safe carriage, if they will accept him to be their bearer and helper, and will trust themselves on him, and hold fast by him till they come to the further side. Some refuse his help, and think he would deceive them, and lead them into the deep, and there leave them to perish. Some had rather play on the ice, and will not hearken to him. Some dare not venture through the streams, or will not endure the coldness of the water. Some waveringly agree to him, and hold faintly by his skirt, and when they feel the cold water, or are near the deep, or are weary of holding, they lose him; either turning back, or perishing suddenly in the gulf. The children are of the same mind with the rest; but he is resolved to lose none of them, and therefore he chargeth them to come with him, and tells them fully what a welcome they shall have with their father; and ceaseth not his importunity till he persuade them to consent.

Some of them say, 'How shall we ever get over the river? we shall be drowned by the way.' He tells them, 'I will carry you safe over, so you will but hold fast by me. Never fear, I warrant you.' They all lay hold on him, and venture in with him. When they are in the midst some are afraid, and cry out, 'We shall be drowned.' These he encourageth, and bids them trust him; hold fast and fear not. Others, when they hear these words, that they need not fear, grow so bold and utterly secure, as to lose their hold. To these he speaketh in other language, and chargeth them to hold fast by him; for if they lose their hold, they will fall into the bottom, and if they stick not to him they will be drowned. Some of them upon this warning hold fast; others are so boldly confident of his skill, and good-will, and promise, that they forget or value not his warning and threatening, but lose their hold. Some through laziness and weariness do the like. Whereupon he lets them sink till they are almost drowned, and cry out for help, 'Save us or we perish,' and think they are all lost; and then he layeth hold of them and fetcheth them up again, and chideth them for their bold folly, and biddeth them look better to themselves, and hold faster by him hereafter, if they love themselves. Some at last through mere weariness and weakness before they can reach the bank, cry out, 'Oh! I am tired, I faint, I shall never hold fast till I reach the shore, I shall be drowned.' These he comforteth, and gives them cordials, and holdeth them by the hand, and bids them, Despair not: Do your best: Hold fast, and I will help you. And so he brings them all safe to the haven.

This king is God; heaven is his habitation; the subjects are all men; the river or sea is the pas-

sage of this life. The further side is all men's natural, sinful distance and separation from God and happiness; the ice that bears them, is this frail life of pleasures, profits, and honors, which delight the flesh; the depth unfrozen is hell; he that enticeth them thither is the devil. The eldest son that is sent to bring them over is Jesus Christ; his commission and undertaking is, to help all over that refuse not his help.

Direct. XXI. The next advice which I must give you, is this, 'Be thankful if you can but reach to a settled peace, and composure of your mind, and lay not too much on the high raptures and feelings of comfort which some do possess; and if ever you enjoy such feeling joys, expect not that they should be either long or often.'

It is the cause of miserable languishing to many a poor soul, to have such importunate expectations of such passionate joys, that they think without these they have no true comfort at all; no witness of the Spirit, no spirit of adoption, no joy in the Holy Ghost. Some think that others have much of this, though they have not, and therefore they torment themselves because it is not with them as with others; when, alas, they little know how it goes with others. Yet I doubt not but solid men have oft high joys; and more we might all have, if we did our duty. And I would have no Christian content himself with a dull quietness of spirit, but by all means possible to be much in laboring to rejoice in God and raising their souls to heavenly delights. Look at these joys and delights as duties and as mercies, but look not at them as marks of trial, so as to place more necessity in them than God hath done, or to think them to be ordinary things. If you do but feel such a high estimation

of Christ and heaven, that you would not leave him for all the world, take this for your surest sign. And if you have but so much probability or hope of your interest in him, that you can think of God as one that loveth you, and can be thankful to Christ for redeeming you, and are more glad in these hopes of your interest in Christ and glory, than if you were owner of all the world; take this for a happy mercy and a high consolation.

And let me add this: commonly those that have the highest passionate joys, have the saddest lives; for they have withal, the most passionate fears and sorrows. Mark the same people that usually have the highest joys, and see whether at other times they have not the greatest troubles. This week they are as at the gates of heaven, and the next as at the doors of hell: I am sure with many it is so. Yet it need not be so, if Christians would but look at these high joys as duties to be endeavored, and mercies to be valued; but when they will needs judge of their state by them, and think that God is gone from them or forsaken them, when they have not such joys, then it leaves them in terror and amazement. Live therefore on your peace of conscience as your ordinary diet; when this is wanting, know that God appointeth you a fast for your health; and when you have a feast of high joys, feed on it and be thankful; but when they are taken from you, gape not after them as the disciples did after Christ at his ascension; but return thankfully to your ordinary diet of peace. And remember that these joys, which are now taken from you, may so return again. However there is a place preparing for you, where your joys shall be full.

Direct. XXII. My next direction is this, 'Spend

more of your time and care about your duty than about your comforts: and for the exercise and increase of your graces, than for the discovery of them: and when you have done all that you can for assurance and comfort, you shall find that it will very much depend on your actual obedience.'

Consideration, frequent serious consideration, is God's great instrument to convert the soul, and to confirm it; to get grace, and to keep it, and increase it. If any soul perish for want of grace, it is ten to one it is mainly for want of frequent and serious consideration. That the most of us do languish under such weaknesses, and attain to small degrees of grace, is for want of sober, frequent consideration. We know not how great things this would do, if it were but faithfully managed. This then is my advice, when you feel so great a want of faith and love, (for those be the main graces for trial and use,) that you doubt whether you have any or none, lay by those doubting thoughts awhile, and presently go and set yourself to consider of God's truth, goodness, amiableness, and kindheartedness to miserable, unworthy sinners; think what he is in himself, and what he is to you, and what he hath done for you, and what he will do for you if you will but consent. And then think of the vanity of all the childish pleasures of this world; how soon, and in how sad a case they will leave us; and what silly, contemptible things they are, in comparison of the everlasting glory of the saints! By that time you have warmed your soul a little with such serious thoughts, you will find your faith and love revive, and begin to stir and work within you; and then you will feel that you have faith and love. Use, therefore, instead of doubting of your faith, to

believe till you put it out of doubt. And if yet you doubt, study God and Christ, and glory yet better, and keep those objects by consideration close to your heart, whose nature is to work the heart to faith and love.

Let me ask: have you not darkened, buried, or weakened your graces, instead of exercising and increasing them, even when you complained for want of assurance of them? When you found a want of faith and love, have not you weakened them more, and so made them less discernible? Have you not fed your unbelief, and taken Satan's part against yourself; and (which is far worse) have you never, through these doubtings, entertained hard thoughts of God, and presented him to your soul, as unwilling to show you mercy, and in unlovely, dreadful, hideous shape, fitter to affright you from him, than to draw you to him, and likelier to provoke your hatred than your love? If you have not done thus, I know too many troubled souls that have. And if you have, you have taken a very unlikely way to get assurance. If you would have been certain that you loved God in sincerity, you should have labored to love him more, till you had been certain; and that you might do so, you should have kept better thoughts of God in your mind. You will hardly love him while you think of him as evil, or at least as hurtful to you. Never forget this rule which I lay you down in the beginning, that He that will ever love God, must apprehend him to be good. And the more large and deep are our apprehensions of his goodness, the more will be our love. And when you confer with ministers, or others, that may teach you, see that you ask ten times at least, 'How should I get or increase my faith, my love to Christ, and to his

people?" for once that you ask, 'How shall I know that I believe or love?' Yet so contrary hath been and still is the practice of most Christians among us in this point, that I have heard it twenty times asked, 'How shall I know that I truly love the brethren?' for once that I have heard it demanded, 'How should I bring my heart to love them better?' And the like I may say of love to Christ himself.

Direct. XXIII. My next advice is this, 'Think not those doubts and troubles of mind, which are caused and continued by willful disobedience, will ever be well healed but by the healing of that disobedience; or that the same means must be used, and will suffice to the cure of such troubles; which must be used and will suffice to cure the troubles of a tender conscience, and of an obedient Christian, whose trouble is merely through mistakes of their condition.'

A true Christian would love God more perfectly and delight in him more abundantly, and bring every thought in subjection to his will, and subdue the very remnants of carnal concupiscence, that there should be no stirrings of lust or unjust anger, or worldly desires, or pride within him; and that no vain word might pass his lips: all this he would do, but he cannot. Striving against these unavoidable infirmities, is conquering.

But though we cannot keep under every motion of concupiscence, we can forbear the execution. Anger will stir up provocations; but we may restrain it in degree, that it set us not in a flame, and do not much distemper or discompose our minds. And we can forbid our tongues all raging, furious or abusive words in our anger; all cursing, swearing, or reproachful speaking. If an envious thought against one brother do arise in our hearts,

because he is preferred before us, we may hate it, and repress it, and chide our hearts for it, and command our tongues to speak well of him, and no evil. Some pride and self-esteem will remain and be stirring in us, do what we can; it is a sin so deeply rooted in our corrupt natures. But yet we can detest it, and resist it, and meet it with abhorrence of our self-conceited thoughts, and rejoicings in our own reputations and fame, and inward heart-risings against those that undervalue us, and stand in the way of our repute; and we may forbear our boasting language, and our contestings for our credit, and our excuses of our sins, and our backbitings and secret defaming of those that cross us in the way of credit. We may forbear our quarrels, and estrangements, and dividings from our brethren, and stiff insisting on our own conceits, and expecting that others should make our judgments their rule, and say and do as we would have them, and all dance after our pipe; all which are the effects of inward pride. We cannot, while we are on earth, be free from all inordinate love of the world, and the riches and honors of it; but we may so watch against it, and repress it, as that it shall neither be preferred before God, nor draw us to unlawful ways of gain, by lying, deceit, and overreaching our brethren; by stealing, unjust or unmerciful dealings, oppressing the poor, and insulting over those that are in the way of our thriving, and crushing them that would hinder our aspiring designs, and treading them down that will not bow to us, and taken revenge of them that have crossed or disparaged us, or cruelly exacting all our rights and debts of the poor, and squeezing the purses of subjects or tenants, or those that we bargain with, like a

sponge, as long as anything will come out. Yea. we may so far subdue our love of the world, as that it shall not hinder us from being merciful to the poor, compassionate to our servants and laborers, and bountiful to our power in doing good works; nor yet shut out God's service from our families and closets; nor rob him of our frequent, affectionate thoughts, especially on the Lord's day. So for sensuality, or the pleasing of our flesh more immediately; we shall never on earth be wholly freed from inordinate motions, and temptations, and fleshly desires, and urgent inclinations and solicitations to forbidden things. But yet we may restrain our appetite by reason, so far that it brings us not to gluttony and drunkenness and a studying for our bellies, and pampering of our flesh, or a taking care for it, and making provision to satisfy its lusts: Rom. xiii, 14. We may forbear the obeying it, in excess of apparel, in indecent, scandalous, or time-wasting recreations, in uncleanness, or unchaste speeches or behavior, or the reading of amorous books and sonnets, or feeding our eyes or thoughts on filthy or enticing objects, or otherwise willfully blowing the fire of lust. So also for the performance of duty. We shall never in this life be able to hear or read so diligently, and understandingly, or affectionately, as we would do; nor to remember or profit by what we hear, as we desire. But yet we can bring ourselves to the congregation, and not prefer our ease, or business, or any vain thing before God's word and worship, or loathe or despise it, because of some weakness in the speaker. And we may in a great measure restrain our thoughts from wandering, and force ourselves to attend; and labor when we come home to recall it to mind. We cannot call on God so fervently

believingly, or delightfully, as we would; but yet we may do it as sincerely as we can, and do it constantly. We cannot instruct our children and servants, and reprove or exhort our neighbors, with that boldness, or love, and compassion, and discretion, and meet expressions, as we would; but yet we may do it faithfully and frequently, as we are able.

I advise you, if your soul remain in doubts and troubles, and you cannot enjoy God in any way of peace and comfort, nor see any clear evidence of the sincerity of your faith, take a serious view of your obedience, and faithfully survey your heart and life, and your daily carriage to God in both. See whether there be nothing that provokes God to an unusual jealousy; if there be, it is only the increase of some carnal interest in your heart, or else the willful or negligent falling into some actual sin, of commission or of omission. And here let me tell you, when you are making this search, what particulars they be which I would have you to be most jealous of.

Inquire carefully into your humility. It is not for nothing that Christ hath said so much of the excellency and necessity of this grace, when he bids us learn of him to be meek and lowly; when he blesseth the meek and poor in spirit: when he setteth a little child in the midst of them, and telleth them, except they become as that child, they could not enter into the kingdom of heaven: when he stoopeth to wash and wipe his disciples' feet, requiring them to do so by one another. For though pride may not be so predominant and raging as to damn you, yet may it cause God to afflict you, and hide his face from you, and humble you by the sense of his displeasure, and the conceal-

ment of his love. And though one would think that doubting, troubled souls should be always the most humble and freest from pride, yet sad experience hath certified me, that much pride may dwell with great doubtings and distress of mind. Even some of the same souls that cry out of their own unworthiness, and fear lest they shall be firebrands of hell, yet cannot endure a close reproof, especially for any disgraceful sin, nor bear a disparaging word, nor love those, nor speak well of them, who do not value them, nor endure to be crossed or contradicted in word or deed, but must have all go their way, and follow their judgment, and say as they say, and dance after their pipe, and their hearts rise against those that will not do it; much more against those that speak or do any thing to the diminishing of their reputation: they cannot endure to be low, and passed by, and overlooked, when others are preferred before them, or to be slighted and disrespected, or their words, or parts, or works, or judgments to be contemned or disparaged. Nay, some are scarce able to live in the same house, or church or town, in love and peace, with any but those that will humor and please them, and speak them fair, and give them smooth and stroking language, and forbear crossing, reproving, and disparaging them. Every one of these singly is an evident mark and fruit of pride; how much more all jointly. I seriously profess it amazeth me to consider how heinously most professors are guilty of this sin! even when they know it to be the devil's own sin, and the great abomination hated of God.

The next sin that I would have you be specially jealous of, is covetousness, or love of the profits or riches of the world. This is not the sin of the

rich only, but also of the poor: and more heinous is it in them, to love the world inordinately, that have so little of it, than in rich men, that have more to tempt them, though dangerous in both.

The third great heart-sin which I would have you jealous of, is sensuality or voluptuousness, or pleasing the senses inordinately. When a man cannot deny his appetite what it would have; or at least, covetousness can do more in restraining it than conscience; when a man cannot make a covenant with his eyes, but must gaze on every alluring object; when the flesh draws to forbidden pleasures, in meats, drinks, apparel, recreations, lasciviousness, and all the considerations of reason cannot restrain it; this is a sad case, and God may well give over such to sadness of heart. If we walk so pleasingly to the flesh, God will walk more displeasingly to us. The cure lieth in break-off sin, to the utmost of your power. This is the Achan that disquieteth all. It is God's great mercy that he disquieteth you in sinning, and gives you not over to so deep a slumber and peace in sin, as might hinder your repentance and reformation.

Direct. XXIV. My next advice for the obtaining of a settled peace of comfort, is this, 'Take heed that you content not yourself with a cheap course of religion, and such a serving of God, as costeth you little or nothing. But in your abstaining from sin, in your rising out of sin, and in your discharge of duty, incline most to that way which is most self-denying, and displeasing to the flesh, (so you be sure it be a lawful way). And when you are called out to any work which will stand you in extraordinary labor and cost, you must be so far from shrinking and drawing your neck out of the yoke, that you must look upon it as a special price

that is put into your hand, and singular advantage and opportunity for the increase of your comforts.'

Let the experience of the world of Christians be produced, and all will attest the same truth. That it is God's usual course to give men larger comforts in dearer duties, than in cheap: nay, seldom doth he give large comforts in cheap duties, and seldom doth he deny them in dearer; so be it they are not made dear by our own sin and foolish indiscretion, but by his command, and our faithfulness in obeying him. Who knows not that the consolation of martyrs is usually above other men's, who hath read of their sufferings and strange sustentations? Christian, do but try this by thy own experiences, and tell me, when thou hast most resolutely followed Christ in a good cause; when thou hast stood against the faces of the greatest for God; when thou hast cast thy life, thy family and estate upon Christ, and run thyself into the most apparent hazards for his sake; hast thou not come off with more inward peace and comfort, than the cheaper part of thy religion hath afforded thee? When thou hast stood to the truth and Gospel, and hast done good through the greatest opposition, and lost thy greatest and dearest friends, because thou wouldst not forsake Christ and his service, or deal falsely in some cause that he hath trusted thee in; hast thou not come off with the blessing of peace of conscience? Nay, when thou hast denied thy most importunate appetite, and most crossed thy lusts, and most humbled and abase thyself for God, and denied thy credit, and taken shame to thyself in a free confessing of thy faults, or patiently put up with the greatest abuses, or humbled and tamed thy flesh by necessary abstinence, or any way most displeasing it, by crossing its interest, by bountiful

giving, laborious duty, dangers or sufferings, for the sake of the Lord Jesus, his truth and people; hath it not been far better with thee in thy peace and comforts than before? I know some will be ready to say, that may be from carnal pride in our own doing or suffering. I answer, it may be so; and therefore let all watch against that. But I am certain that this is God's ordinary dealing with his people, and therefore we may ordinarily expect it. It is for their encouragement in faithful duty; and I may truly say, for their reward, when himself calls that a reward which he gives for a cup of water.

For my part I think, that if Christians took God's word before them, and spared the flesh less, and trusted themselves and all to Christ alone, and did not balk all the troublesome and costly part of religion, and that which most crosseth the interest of the flesh, it would be more ordinary with them to be filled with the joys of the Holy Ghost, and walk in that peace of conscience which is a continual feast; and to have such full and frequent views both of the sincerity of their evidencing graces, and of God's reconciled face, as would banish their doubts and fears and be a greater help to their certainty of salvation, than much other labor doth prove. If you flinch not the fiery furnace, you shall have the company of the Son of God in it. If you flinch not the prison and stocks, you may be able to sing as Paul and Silas did. If you refuse not to be stoned with Stephen, you may perhaps see heaven opened as he did. If you think these comforts so dear bought, that you will rather venture without them; let me tell you, you may take your course, but the end will convince you to the very heart, of the folly of your choice.

Direct. XXV. My next advice shall be some-

what near of kin to the former. If you would learn the most expeditious way to peace and settled comfort, 'Study well the art of doing good; and let it be your every day's contrivance, care, and business, how you may lay out all that God hath trusted you with, to the greatest pleasing of God, and to your most comfortable account.'

Doing good is a high part of a Christian's obedience, and must be the chief part of his life. The heathen could tell him that asked him, how men might be like to God; that one way was, To do good to all. Now it is not enough to make this your care now and then, or do good when it falls in your way; but you must study which are good works, and which are they that you are called to.

This therefore is the thing that I would persuade you to: take yourself for God's steward; remember the time when it will be said to you, "Give account of thy stewardship; thou shalt be no longer steward." Let it be your every day's contrivance, how to lay out your gifts, time, strength, riches, or interest, to your Master's use. Think which way you may do most, first to promote the Gospel and the public good of the church; and then, which way you may help toward the saving of particular men's souls; and then, which way you may better the commonwealth, and how you may do good to men's bodies, beginning with your own and those of your family, but extending your help as much further as you are able. Ask yourself every morning, "Which way may I this day most further my Master's business, and the good of men?" Ask yourself every night, "What good have I done to-day?" Oh the easiness of man's heart to be deluded! Do rich men never think to lie rotting in the dust? Do they never think that

they must be accountable for all their riches, and for all their time, and power, and interests? Do they not know that it will comfort them at death and judgment, to hear in their reckoning, Item, so much given to such and such poor; so much to promote the Gospel; so much to maintain poor scholars, while they study to prepare themselves for the ministry? etc. Than to hear, So much in such a feast; to entertain such gallants; to please such noble friends; so much at dice, at cards, at horse-races, at cock-fights; so much in excess of apparel; and the rest to leave my posterity in the like pomp? Do they not know that it will comfort them more to hear then of their time spent in reading Scripture, secret and open prayer, instructing and examining their children and servants; going to their poor neighbors' houses to see what they want, and to persuade them to godliness; and in being examples of eminent holiness to all; and in suppressing vice, and doing justice, than to hear of so much time spent in vain recreations, visits, luxuries, and idleness?

Direct. XXVI. Having led you thus far toward a settled peace, my next Direction shall contain a necessary caution, lest you run as far into the contrary extreme, viz: 'Take heed that you neither trouble your own soul with needless scruples, about matters of doctrine, of duty, or of sin, or about your own condition. Nor yet that you do not make yourself more work than God hath made you, by feigning things unlawful, which God hath not forbidden; or by placing your religion in will-worship, or in an over-curious insisting on circumstantial, or an over-rigorous dealing with your body.'

It hath ever been the devil's policy to begin in persuading men to worldliness, flesh-pleasing,

security, and presumption, and utter neglect of God and their souls, or at least preferring their bodies and worldly things, and by this means he destroyeth the world. But where this will not take, but God awaketh men effectually, and casteth out the sleepy devil, usually he fills men's heads with needless scruples, and next setteth them on a religion not commanded, and would make poor souls believe they do nothing, if they do not more than God hath commanded them. When the devil hath no other way left to destroy religion and godliness, he will pretend to be religious and godly himself, and then he is always over-religious and over-godly in his materials. All overdoing in God's work is undoing; and whoever you meet with that would overdo, suspect him to be either a subtle, destroying enemy, or one deluded by the destroyer.

When he could not persuade the world to persecute Christ, and to refuse him and his worship, the serpent will be the most zealous worshiper, and saith, as Herod, and with the same mind, "Come and tell me, that I may worship him." He persuades men to do and overdo. He sets them on laying out their revenues in sumptuous fabrics, in fighting to be masters of the holy land and sepulcher of Christ; on going pilgrimages; worshiping saints, angels, shrines, relics, adoring the very bread of the sacrament as God, excessive fastings, choice of meats, numbered prayers on beads, repetitions of words, so may Ave Maries, Pater Nosters, the name Jesus so oft repeated in a breath, so many holidays to saints, canonical hours, even at midnight to pray, and that in Latin for greater reverence, crossings, holy garments, variety of prescribed gestures, kneeling and worshiping

before images, sacrificing Christ again to his Father in the mass; forswearing marriage; living retiredly, as separate from the world; multitudes of new, prescribed rules and orders of life; vowing poverty; begging without need; creeping to the cross, holy water, and holy bread, carrying palms, kneeling at altars, bearing candles, ashes; in baptism, crossing, conjuring out the devil, salting, spittle, oil; taking pardons, indulgences, and dispensations of the pope; praying for the dead, perambulations, serving God to merit heaven, or to ease souls in purgatory; doing works of supererogation, with multitudes the like. All these hath the devil added to God's worship, so zealous a worshiper of Christ is he, when he takes that way.

If he can but get you by excessive fastings, watchings, labors, studies, or other austerities, especially sadness and perplexities of mind, to have a sick body, a crazed brain, or a short life, you will be able to do him but little hurt, and God but little service, beside the pleasure that he takes in your own vexation. Nay, he will hope to make a further advantage of your weakness, and to keep many a soul in the snares of sensuality, by telling them of your miseries, and saying to them, "Dost thou not see in such a man or woman, what it is to be so holy and precise? They will all run mad at last. If once thou grow so strict, and deny thyself thy pleasures, and take this precise course, thou wilt but make thy life a misery, and never have a merry day again." Such examples as yours the devil will make use of that he may terrify poor souls from godliness, and represent the word and ways of Christ to them in an odious, and unpleasant, and discouraging shape. You are commanded to love your neighbors but as yourself; and there

fore by cruelty and unmerciful dealing with your own body, you will go about to justify the like dealings with others. You durst not deny to feed, to clothe, to comfort, and refresh the poor, lest Christ should say, "You did it not to me." And how should you dare to deny the same to yourself? How will you answer God for the neglect of all that service which you should have done him, and might, if you had not disabled your bodies and mind? He requireth that you delight yourself in him. And how can you do that when you habituate both mind and body to a sad, dejected, mournful garb?

The next part of my Direction is, That you avoid causeless scruples, about doctrines, duties, sins, or your own state. If you send a man on a journey, would you like him better that would stand questioning and scrupling every step he goes, whether he set the right foot before? Or whether he should go in the footpath or in the road? Or him that would cheerfully go on, not thinking which foot goeth forward; and rather step a little beside the path, and in again, than to stand scrupling when he should be going? If you send reapers into your harvest, which would you like better, him that would stand scrupling how many straws he should cut down at once, and at what height; and with fears of cutting them too high or too low, too many at once or too few, should do you but little work? Or him that should do his work cheerfully, as well as he can? Would you not be angry at such childish, unprofitable diligence or curiosity, as is a hinderance to your work?

Satan will make you believe that everything is a sin, that he may disquiet you, if he cannot get you to believe that nothing almost is sin, that he may

destroy you. You shall not put a bit in your mouth, but he will move a scruple, whether it were not too good, or too much. You shall not clothe yourself, but he will move you to scruple the lawfulness of it. You shall not come into any company, but he will afterward vex you about every word you spoke, lest you sinned.

Direct. XXVII. 'When God hath once showed you a certainty, or but a strong probability of your sincerity and his especial love, labor to fix this so deep in your apprehension and memory, that it may serve for the time to come, and not only for the present. And leave not your soul too open to changes, upon every new apprehension, nor to question all that is past upon every jealousy; except when some notable declining to the world, and the flesh, or a committing of gross sins, or a willfulness or carelessness in other sins that you may avoid, do give you just cause of questioning your sincerity, and bringing your soul again to the bar, and your estate to a more exact review.'

If when God hath given you assurance, or strong probabilities of your sincerity, you will make use of it but only for that present time, you will never then have a settled peace in your soul: beside, the great wrong you do to God, by necessitating him to be so often renewing such discoveries, and repeating the same words to you so often over. If your child offend you, would you have him when he is pardoned, no longer to believe it, than you are telling him? Should he be still asking you over and over every day, 'Father, am I forgiven, or no?' Should not one answer serve his turn? Will you not believe that your money is in your purse or chest any longer than you are looking on it? Or that your corn is growing on your land, or your

cattle in your grounds, any longer than you are looking on them? By this course a rich man should have no more content than a beggar, longer than he is looking on his money, or goods, or lands; and when he is looking on one, he should again lose the comfort of all the rest. What hath God given you a memory for, but to lay up former apprehensions, and discoveries, and experiences, and make use of them on all meet occasions afterward? When God hath once resolved your doubts, and showed you the truth of your faith, love, or obedience, write it deep in your memory; and do not suffer any fancies, or fears, or light surmises, to cause you to question this again, as long as you fall not from the obedience or faith which you then discovered. Alas! man's apprehension is a most mutable thing! If you leave your soul open to every new apprehension, you will never be settled: you may think two contrary things of yourself in an hour. You will never want some occasion of jealousy and fears as long as you have corruption in your heart, and sin in your life, and a tempter to be troubling you; but if you will suffer any such wind to shake your peace and comforts, you will be always shaking and fluctuating, as a wave of the sea.

Oh that you could well observe this Direction! How much it would help you to escape extremes, and conduce to the settling of a well-grounded peace, and at once to the well ordering of your whole conversation!

Direct. XXVIII. 'Be very careful that you create not perplexities and terrors in your own soul, by rash misinterpretations of any passages either of Scripture, of God's providence, or of the sermons or private speeches of ministers: but resolve with

patience, yea, with gladness, to suffer preachers to deal with their congregations in the most searching, serious, and awakening manner, lest your weakness should be a wrong to the whole assembly, and possibly the undoing of many a sensual, drowsy, or obstinate soul, who will not be convinced and awakened by a comforting way of preaching, or by any smoother or gentler means.'

Some weak-headed, troubled Christians can scarce read a chapter, or hear one read, but they will find something which they think doth condemn them. If they read of God's wrath and judgment, they think it is meant against them. If they read, "Our God is a consuming fire," they think presently it is themselves that must be the fuel; whereas justice and mercy have each their proper objects; the burning fire will not waste the gold, nor is water the fuel of it; but combustible matter it will presently consume. A humble soul that lies prostrate at Christ's feet, confessing its unworthiness, and bewailing its sinfulness, this is not the object of revenging justice. Another reads in Psalm 1, "I will set thy sins in order before thee;" and he thinks, certainly God will deal thus by him, not considering that God chargeth only their sins upon them that charge them not by true repentance on themselves, and accept not of Christ who hath discharged them by his blood. He makes not a poor sinner's burden more heavy by hitting him in the teeth with his sins, but makes it the office of his Son to ease him by disburdening him.

Nothing more common with troubled souls, than upon every new cross and affliction that befalls them, presently to think, God takes them for hypocrites; and to question their sincerity! As if David and Job had not left them a full warning

against this temptation. Do you lose your goods? So did Job. Do you lose your children? So did Job; and that in no very comfortable way. Do you lose your health? So did Job. What if your godly friends should come about you in this case, and bend all their wits and speeches to persuade you that you are but a hypocrite, as Job's friends did by him, would not this put you harder to it? Yet could Job resolve, "I will not let go mine integrity till I die." How many a soul have I known that, by misinterpreting providences, have in a blind jealousy, been turned quite from truth and duty, supposing it had been error and sin; and all because of their afflictions.

The third enemy to your peace is: Misinterpreting or misapplying the passages of preachers in their sermons, writings, or private speeches. A minister cannot deal thoroughly or seriously with any sort of sinners, but some fearful, troubled souls apply all to themselves. I must entreat you to avoid this fault, or else you will turn God's ordinances and the daily food of your souls, into bitterness and wormwood, and all through your mistakes. I confess it is a better sign of an honest heart and self-judging conscience, to say, 'He speaks now to me, this is my case;' than to say, 'He speaks now to such or such a one, this is their case.' For it is the property of hypocrites to have their eye most abroad, and in every duty to be minding most the faults of others: and you may much discern such in their prayers, in that they will fill their confessions most with other men's sins, and you may feel them all the while in the bosom of their neighbors, when you may even feel a sincere man speaking his own heart, and most opening his own bosom to God.

Let me now desire you hereafter, to be glad to hear ministers awaken the profane and dead-hearted hearers, and search all to the quick, and misapply nothing to yourself; but if you think any passage doth nearly concern you, open your mind to the minister privately, when he may satisfy you more fully, and that without doing hurt to others: and consider what a straight ministers are in, that have so many of so different conditions, inclinations, and conversations to preach to.

Direct. XXIX. 'Be sure you forget not to distinguish between causes of doubting of your sincerity, and causes of mere humiliation, repentance, and amendment; and do not raise doubtings and fears, where God calleth you but to humiliation, amendment, and fresh recourse to Christ.'

What more common than for poor Christians to pour out a multitude of complaints of their weaknesses, and wants, and miscarriages; and never consider all the while that there may be cause of sorrow in these, when yet there is no cause of doubting of their sincerity. God dealeth very variously with his chosen in their conversion, as to the accidentals and circumstantials of the work. Some he calleth not home till they have run a long race in the way of rebellion, in open drunkenness, swearing, worldliness, and derision of holiness: these he usually humbleth more deeply, and they can better observe the several steps of the Spirit in the work; (and yet not always neither). Others he so restraineth in their youth, that though they have not saving grace, yet they are not guilty of any gross sins, but have a liking to the people and ways of God: and yet he doth not savingly convert them till long after. It is much harder for these to discern the time or manner of their conversion; yet

usually some conjectures they may make: and usually their humiliation is not so deep. Others, as is said, have the saving workings of the Spirit in their very childhood, and these can least of all discern the certain time or order. The ordinary way of God's dealing with those that are children of godly parents, and have good education, is, by giving them some liking of godly persons and ways, some conscience of sin, some repentance and recourse by prayer to God in Christ for mercy; yet youthful lusts and folly, and ill company, do usually much stifle it, till at last, by some affliction, or sermon, or book, or good company, God setteth home the work, and maketh them more resolute and victorious Christians. These persons now can remember that they had convictions, and stirring consciences when they were young, and the other forementioned works, perhaps they can remember some more notable rousings and awakenings long after, and perhaps they have had many such fits and steps, and the work hath stood at this pass for a long time, even many years together. But at which of all these changes it was that the soul began to be savingly sincere, I think is next to an impossibility to discern. According to that experience which I have had of the state of Christians, I am forced to judge the most of the children of the godly that ever are renewed, are renewed in their childhood, or much toward it then done, and that among forty Christians there 's not one that can certainly name the month in which his soul first began to be sincere; and among a thousand Christians, I think not one can name the hour. The sermon which awakened them, they may name, but not the hour when they first arrived at a saving sincerity.

My advice to all Christians, is this: Find Christ by his Spirit dwelling in your hearts, and then never trouble yourselves, though you know not the time or manner of his entrance. Do you value Christ above the world, and resolve to choose him before the world, and perform these resolutions? Then need you not doubt but the Spirit of Jesus is victorious in you.

Direct. XXX. 'Whatsoever new doubtings do arise in your soul, see that you carefully discern whether they are such as must be resolved from the consideration of general grace, or of special grace. And especially be sure of this, that when you want or lose your certainty of sincerity and salvation, you have presently recourse to the probability of it, and lose not the comforts of that. Or if you should lose the sight of a probability of special grace, yet see that you have recourse at the utmost to general grace, and never let go the comforts of that at the worst.'

Let the first thing which you do upon every doubt, be this: To consider, whether it come from the unbelieving or low apprehensions of the general grounds of comfort, or from the want of evidence of special grace. For that which is a fit remedy for one of these, will do little for the cure of the other. If your doubting be only, Whether you be sincere in believing, loving, hoping, repenting, and obeying, then it will not answer this doubt, though you discern never so much of God's merciful nature, or Christ's gracious office, or the universal sufficiency of his death and satisfaction, or the freeness and extent of the promise of pardon. It will be no saving plea at the day of judgment to say, Though I repented not, and believed not, yet Christ died for me. or God is merciful, or Christ

repented and believed for me, or God made me a free promise and gift of salvation, if I would repent and believe. What comfort would such an answer give them? And therefore, doubtless it will not serve now to quiet any knowing Christian against those doubts that arise from the want of particular evidence of special grace, though in their own place, the general grounds of comfort are of absolute necessity thereto.

Now I would ask you this question in your greatest fears that you are out of Christ: Are you willing to have Christ to pardon, sanctify, guide, and save you, or not? If you are, then you are a true believer, and did not know it. If you are not, if you will but wait on God's word in hearing, and reading, and consider frequently and seriously of the necessity and excellency of Christ and glory, and the evil of sin, and the vanity of the world, and will but beg earnestly of God to make you willing, you shall find that God hath not appointed you this means in vain, and that this way will be more profitable to you than all your complainings.

Direct. XXXI. 'If God do bless you with an able, faithful, prudent, judicious pastor, take him for your guide under Christ in the way to salvation; and open to him your case, and desire his advice in all your extraordinary, pressing necessities, where you have found the advice of other godly friends to be insufficient; and this not once or twice only, but as often as such pressing necessities shall return. Or if your own pastor be more defective for such a work, make use of some other minister of Christ, who is more meet.'

The devil hath great advantage while you keep his counsel; two are better than one; for if one

of them fall, he hath another to help him. It is dangerous, resisting such an enemy alone. A uniting of forces oft procureth victory. God giveth others knowledge, prudence, and other gifts for our good; that so every member of the body may have need of another, and each be useful to the other. An independency of Christian upon Christian, is most unchristian; much more of people on their guides. It ceaseth to be a member, which is separated from the body; and to make no use of the body or fellow members, is next to separation from them. Sometimes bashfulness is the cause, sometimes self-confidence (a far worse cause); but whatever is the cause of Christians smothering their doubts, the effects are oft sad. The disease is oft gone so far, that the cure is very difficult, before some bashful, or proud, or tender patients will open their disease. The very opening of a man's grief to a faithful friend, doth oft ease the heart of itself.

But you must understand well when this is your duty. Not in every small infirmity, which accompanies Christians in their daily most watchful conversation. Nor yet in every lesser doubt, which may be otherwise resolved. It is a folly and a wrong to physicians to run to them for every cut finger or prick with a pin. But first study the case yourself, and seek God's direction: if that will not serve, open your case to your nearest bosom friend that is godly and judicious. If you either fall into any grievous sin, or any terrible pangs of conscience, or any great straits and difficulties about matters of doctrine or practice, go presently to your pastor for advice. The devil, and pride, and bashfulness, will do their utmost to hinder you; but see that they prevail not.

But I know some will say, That is near to Popish auricular confession, which I here persuade Christians to, and it is to bring Christians under the tyranny of the priests again, and make them acquainted with all men's secrets, and masters of their consciences.

Answ. 1. To the last, I say to the railing devil of this age, no more but "The Lord rebuke thee." If any minister have wicked ends, let the God of heaven convert him, or root him out of his church, and cast him among the weeds and briers. But is it not the known voice of sensuality, and hell, to cast reproaches upon the way and ordinances of God? Who knoweth not that it is the very office of the ministry, to be teachers and guides to men in matters of salvation, and overseers of them? and that they watch for their souls, as those that must give an account. A disease unknown is unlike to be cured; and a disease well known is half cured. Not that every man is bound to open all his sins to his pastor; but those that cannot well be otherwise cured, he must; either if the sense of the guilt cannot be removed, and true assurance of pardon obtained: or else, if power against the sin be not otherwise obtained, but that it still prevaieth; in both these cases we must go to those that God hath made our directors and guides. I am confident many a thousand souls do long strive against anger, lust, flesh-pleasing, worldliness, and trouble of conscience to little purpose, who if they would but have taken God's way, and sought for help, and opened all their case to their minister, they might have been delivered in a good measure long ago. *Answ.* 2. And for Popish confession, I detest it. We would not persuade men that there is a necessity of confessing

every sin to a minister, before it can be pardoned. Nor do we do it in a perplexed formality only at one time of the year; nor in order to Popish pardons or satisfactions; but we would have men go for physic to their souls, as they do for their bodies, when they feel they have need. And let me advise all Christian congregations to practice this excellent duty more. See that you knock oftener at your pastor's door, and ask his advice in all your pressing necessities; do not let him sit quietly in his study for you; make him know by experience, that the tenth part of a minister's labor is not in the pulpit. If your sins are strong, and you have wounded conscience deep, go for his advice for a safe cure; many a man's sore festers to damnation for want of this; and poor, ignorant, and scandalous sinners have far more need to do this than troubled consciences.

Direct. XXXII. 'As ever you would live in peace and comfort, and well pleasing unto God, be sure that you understand and deeply consider wherein the height of a Christian life, and the greatest part of our duty doth consist; to wit: In a loving delight in God, and a thankful and cheerful obedience to his will; and then make this your constant aim, and be still aspiring after it, and let all other affections and endeavors be subservient unto this.'

This one rule well practiced, would do wonders on the souls of poor Christians, in dispelling all their fears and troubles, and helping not only to a settled peace, but to live in the most comfortable state that can be expected upon earth. Write, therefore, these two or three words deep in your understandings and memory; that the life which God is best pleased with, and we should be always

endeavoring, is, a loving delight in God through Christ; and a thankful and cheerful obedience to him. I do not say, that godly sorrows, and fears, and jealousies are no duties; but these are the great duties, to which the rest should all subserve. Many Christians look upon brokenheartedness, and much grieving, and weeping for sin, as if it were the great thing that God delighteth in, and requireth of them; and therefore, they bend all their endeavors this way; and are still striving with their hearts to break them more, and wringing their consciences to squeeze out some tears; and they think no sermon, no prayer, no meditation, speeds so well with them, as that which can help them to grieve or weep. I am far from persuading men against humiliation and godly sorrow, and tenderness of heart. But yet I must tell you, that this is a sore error that you lay so much upon it, and so much overlook that great and noble work and state to which it tendeth. Do you think that God hath any pleasure in your sorrows as such? Doth it do him good to see you dejected, afflicted, and tormented? Alas, it is only as your sorrows do kill your sins, and mortify your fleshly lusts, and prepare for your peace and joys, that God regards them. Because God doth speak comfortably to troubled, drooping spirits, and tells them that he delighteth in the contrite, and loveth the humble, and bindeth up the brokenhearted; therefore men misunderstanding him, do think they should do nothing, but be still breaking their own hearts. Whereas God speaks it but partly to show his hatred to the proud, and partly to show his tender compassions to the humbled, that they might not be overwhelmed or despair. But, O Christians, understand and consider, that all your sorrows are

but preparatives to your joys; and that it is a higher and sweeter work that God calls you to, and would have you spend your time and strength in. The first part of it is love: a work that is wages to itself. He that knows what it is to live in the love of God, doth know that Christianity is no tormenting and discontented life. The next part is, "Delight in God, and in the hopes and forethoughts of everlasting glory." Psal. xxxvii, 4, "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart." This is it that you should be bending your studies and endeavors for, that your soul might be able to delight itself in God. The third part is thankfulness and praise. The fourth part of the Christian life is cheerful obedience.

Will you now lay all this together, and make it for the time to come your business, and try whether it will not be the truest way to comfort, and make your life a blessed life? Will you make it your end in hearing, reading, praying, and meditation, to raise your soul to delight in God?

Oh how the subtle enemy disadvantageth the Gospel, by the misapprehensions and dejected spirits of believers! It is the very design of the ever blessed God, to glorify love and mercy as highly in the work of redemption, as ever he glorified omnipotency in the work of creation. So that he hath laid the foundation of the kingdom of grace in love and mercy; and in love and mercy hath he framed the whole structure of the edifice; and love and mercy are written in legible, indelible characters upon every piece. And the whole frame of his work and temple-service, hath he so composed, that all might be the resounding echoes of love, and the praise and glorious commemoration of love

and mercy might be the great business of our solemn assemblies. And the new creation within us, and without us, is so ordered, that love, thankfulness, and delight, might be both the way and the end. And the serpent who most opposeth God where he seeketh most glory, especially the glory of his grace, doth labor so successfully to obscure this glory, that he hath brought multitudes of poor Christians to have poor, low thoughts of the riches of his grace; and to set every sin of theirs against it, which should but advance it; and even to question the very foundation of the whole building, whether Christ hath redeemed the world by his sacrifice. Yea, he puts such a vail over the glory of the Gospel, that men can hardly be brought to receive it as glad tidings, till they first have assurance of their own sanctification! And the very nature of God's kingdom is so unknown, that some men think it to be unrighteousness, and libertinism, and others to be pensive dejections, and tormenting scruples and fears; and but few know it to be righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. And the very business of a Christian's life and God's service, is rather taken to be scrupling, quarreling, and vexing ourselves and the church of God, than to be love and gratitude, and a delighting our souls in God, and cheerfully obeying him. And thus when Christianity seems a thraldom and torment; and the service of the world, the flesh, and the devil, seems the only freedom, and quiet, and delight, no wonder if the devil have more unfeigned servants than Christ; and if men tremble at the name of holiness, and fly away from religion as a mischief. What can be more contrary to its nature, and to God's design in forming it, than for the professors to live

such dejected and dolorous lives? God calls men from vexation and vanity, to high delights and peace; and men come to God as from peace and pleasure to vexation. All our preaching will do little to win souls from sensuality to holiness, while they look upon the sad lives of the professors of holiness; as it will more deter a sick man from meddling with a physician, to see all he hath in hand to lie languishing in continual pains to their death, than all his words and promises will encourage them. Oh what blessed lives might God's people live, if they understood the love of God in the mystery of man's redemption, and did addict themselves to the consideration and improvement of it, and did believingly eye the promised glory, and hereupon did make it the business of their lives to delight their souls in him that hath loved them!

DIRECTIONS

TO

PERSONS JUST COMMENCING A RELIGIOUS LIFE.

1. REMEMBER that the commencement of the Christian life is to be like the "dawning light, which increaseth more and more to the perfect day." Therefore when the hope of peace and pardon dawns in the heart, do not consider the great business of life as *accomplished*, but only as *begun*.

2. Do not expect so sudden and remarkable a change, as to leave no doubt of its reality. Did religion enter the soul in perfection, and to the entire exclusion of sin, the change would be so marked and obvious as to leave no room for doubt. But usually the Christian character is full of contrarieties. There is a perpetual struggle between good and evil, and thus a continual competition of evidence for and against, according as the good or evil prevails.

3. Evidence of piety is not so much to be sought in *high emotions* of any kind, as in real humility, self-distrust, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, sorrow for sin, and a *continual effort*, in every-day life, to regulate our thoughts, feelings, and conduct by the word of God. It is the *nature* and not the *degree* of our affections which are to

be regarded in the examination of our evidences. Some persons are so *constituted*, that they are not susceptible of very strong emotions, and ought not to expect them, in reference to religion, any more than other subjects that interest the mind. The best way to know our feelings is, to see how they influence the *conduct*. "By their fruit ye shall know them."

4. Do not expect to find in your own case, everything you have heard or read of in the experience of others. For it may be many things we hear and read of, are not correct feelings, and do not afford just grounds of confidence to any one; and if they are *correct* experience, it may be the experience of a *mature* Christian, and not to be expected in the beginning of a religious life. It must be remembered that as no two countenances are formed alike, so no two hearts are fashioned alike, or placed in exactly the same circumstances; and it would be as vain to seek all the varieties of Christian experience in one person, as to seek all the varieties of human features in one face.

5. Do not expect that the evidence desired will all come immediately and at once. It must come *progressively*, as the result of continued effort in obedience to the will of God.

6. Do not suppose that religion is a principle of such self-persevering energy, as that when once implanted in the soul it will continue to thrive and increase without effort. The plant of divine grace can no more thrive without care and diligent and patient cultivation, than can those rare and valued plants, that demand the physical efforts and culture of man.

God will not sustain and bring to maturity the work of grace, without your own voluntary con-

currence in the diligent use of means. He will not do it any more than he would cause the harvest to whiten in the field of the sluggard. Indulge, therefore, no such ideas of inability and dependence on God, as shall impair a full sense of perfect obligation to do whatever *can be done* in working out your own salvation. God never assists any but those who make efforts to aid and advance themselves.

7. Entertain no such ideas of the sovereignty of God in the bestowment of his grace, as would awaken any doubt of his affording needful aid, where he sees sincere endeavors to grow in grace. If some Christians are more eminent than others, it is simply because they make *more efforts* to be so, and God aids these efforts. So that all worldly minded and indifferent Christians continue in this state, because they do not choose to make efforts to get out of it. Any person can be an eminent Christian that chooses to be so. Christians are too apt to feel as if eminence in piety was a distinction made by the sovereignty of God, and to suppose that high attainments are not within the reach of all, and that languid and inefficient piety is the result of divine sovereignty rather than negligence and sloth. A more false or more pernicious opinion cannot easily be adopted by Christians. The truth is, that the road to eminence in gifts and graces, and the means of obtaining them are open to all who seek them, and if any do not obtain them, it is owing to their own sloth and inefficiency, and not to any deficiency on the part of God in blessing diligent efforts. It always pleases him to crown with success the hand of the *diligent* instead of the hand of the slothful, not only in temporal but in spiritual things. This thought cannot

be too strongly impressed upon the minds of those who are just commencing a Christian life. To them *peculiarly*, are such promises as these directed: "Ask, and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you. *Every one* that asketh receiveth," etc.

Do not be afraid of indulging in feelings which may seem to be right, from the fear of deception. On the contrary, cherish such feelings, and try to recall them often. Go forward and *do your duty*, and God will save you from deception while thus employed.

8. There is one caution which is peculiarly needful to those who have been greatly interested in the subject of religion, and that is, *to take particular care of the health*.

There is such a mysterious and intimate connection between the mind and the body, that one cannot be wearied or suffer, without affecting the other. When the mind is fatigued or exhausted, it affects the body, and this again reacts on the mind.

Every person ought to be aware, that the more anxiously and intensely the mind is interested on any subject, the greater is the need of *exercise, sleep, and frequent relaxation*. Attention to religion, does not demand that *all* lawful business be suspended, and forbids the neglect of all needful rest and exercise.

9. Do not expect to be made happy by religion, unless you become *eminent Christians*. A *half-way* Christian can neither enjoy the pleasures of the world nor the pleasures of religion; for his conscience will not let him seek the one, and he is too indolent to obtain the other. The Christian may be the happiest man on earth, but he must be

a faithful, active, and devoted Christian. None are disappointed in finding religion a source of unfailing peace and joy, but those who refuse to drink deep of the wells of salvation; unless we except those who from some derangement of the nervous system, or failure of health, do not enjoy the clear and undisturbed exercise of their faculties. A healthy mind in a healthy body, may always be made happy by religion.

10. Do not look at the practice and example of *other* Christians in forming the standard of piety at which you aim. The allowance of this thing, has probably had a more disastrous influence on the church and on the world, than all other causes that could be named. Generally, when persons commence a Christian life, their consciences are susceptible and tender. They are strict and watchful in the performance of duty, and are pained even by a slight neglect. They have been wont to feel that becoming religious implies a *great change*; that "old things must pass away and *all things* become new." But when they begin to look around among their Christian friends, and turn to them for aid, as those who have had experience and have made advances in Christian life, they find that *they* seem to look upon duties and deficiencies in a very different manner. *They* seem to neglect many things which the young Christian has felt to be very important; and to practice many things which he had supposed to be inconsistent with religion. *Then commences the disastrous effect.* The young Christian begins to feel that he need not be more particular than those to whom he has ever looked up with deference and respect. He begins to imagine that he has been rather *too strict* and particular. He begins to

take a retrograde course, and though his conscience and the Bible often check and reprove, yet after a few inefficient struggles, he lowers his standard and walks as others do.

Look into your Bible and see how Christians ought to live. See how the Bible says those who are Christians *must* live, and then if you find your Christian friends living in a *different* way, instead of having cause for feeling that you may do so too; you have only cause to fear that they are deceiving themselves with the belief that they are Christians, when they are not. Remember that the farther your Christian friends depart from the standard of Christian character laid down in the Bible, the less reason have you to hope that they *are* Christians. And do not hesitate on this subject because you find *many* professed Christians, who are indifferent and lax in their practice and example. Remember that Christ has said: "*Many* shall say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord," thus claiming to be his disciples, to whom he will say, "I never knew you." Do not let *professed* Christians tempt you to fall into the society of such unhappy *castaways*.

11. Do not be *periodical* Christians. There are some who profess religion, who never seem to feel any interest on the subject except when every one else does. It is true, there are special seasons of revived religion in the hearts of all Christians, but if it is only at such times that progress is made in divine life, and interest is manifested in the salvation of souls, there is great reason to fear that what is called religion is nothing but sympathy with the feelings of others.

12 Be sure that there exists a *marked difference* between your appearance and conduct, and

that of those who are not Christians. Remember that Christ has required this of you, and that even *the world* expects it.

Do not suppose you can recommend religion, by appearing interested in everything that interests those who have no better portion than this world. Remember that your deportment, your conversation; your interest in dress, in company and amusements; the manner in which you perform your religious duties, are all carefully noted and weighed by those around you, who do not love religion; and if they do not see a *marked difference* between you and themselves, they either conclude there is nothing in religion, or else, that you are a hypocrite. The world *expect* that you will be *very* different from them, and *despise* you in their hearts if you are not. If you wish to recommend religion let the world see it acted out according to the beautiful pattern laid down in the Bible, and do not suppose that you can improve this pattern by any addition or subtraction of your own. On one subject there are some who need instruction.

There is a class of Christians who appear taciturn, unsocial and even sad. This appearance is altogether inconsistent with the spirit of religion. Christians ought to appear cheerful and happy; to appear to receive with pleasure and gratitude all the lawful enjoyments bestowed by their heavenly Father. Such a gloomy deportment as has been described, does not do honor to religion, and causes those whom we wish to win to the ways of pleasantness and peace, to feel that religion is a melancholy, unsocial, and forbidding subject.

All professors of religion should endeavor to have such views of God, his love, his providence,

his care; and should so live, as to *be* cheerful and happy, and to *appear* so.

On the contrary, there is a class of professed Christians, who indulge in frequent trifling and levity. This is quite as inconsistent and injurious as the former, and if anything it is more so. Let the *Christian* at least, learn to make a distinction between *cheerfulness* and *levity*. Remember we are commanded to avoid *foolish talking and jesting*, and that it is possible to be happy, cheerful, affable, and kind, without any trifling or levity.

13. Remember that your evidence of possessing religion ceases, when anything else has the first place in your thoughts and interests.

Religion should not lessen our love for our friends, or our enjoyment of rational pleasures, but the *desire to please God in all our ways* should be the prevailing feeling of the mind. Our Saviour says, we cannot have two masters; God and his service must be first in our thoughts and affections, or else the world and its pleasures, are first. If then we would find whose servants we are, we must find who has the first place in our thoughts and affections.

14. Never for one day omit to read the Bible with prayer. This is a most important direction. It is of the utmost importance that you should never for once break over this habit. Prayer and the Bible are your anchor and your shield; what will hold you firmly in the path of duty, and protect you from temptation. You had better give up one meal every day, if it is necessary, in order to secure time for this duty. You had better give up anything else. *Nothing is a duty*, if the performance of it will interfere with this duty.

Remember this is the bread of your life, and the water of your salvation; and that you cannot live in health a single day without their strengthening and invigorating influence.

15. Be regulated by a principle of duty in *little things*. This is the way that common Christians are to cause their light to shine. Few Christians can expect to do any *great* things to show their love to the Saviour, but all can "deny themselves, and thus daily take the cross and follow him." Religion should govern the temper and the tongue; should save us from indolence, from vanity, from pride, from foolishness, from levity, from moroseness, from selfishness, and all the little every-day foibles to which we are exposed. Religion should exemplify its gentleness in your kind and affable manners; its purity and propriety, in your conversation; its benevolence in your conduct, and its consistency and heavenly tendency, in all your ways.

It is a most excellent method to go to some sincere and candid friend, and inquire what are your own defects in temper, character, and every-day deportment, and when you have discovered these, make it the object of your prayers and efforts to correct them.

One thing ought to be strictly regulated by principle, and that is the *employment of time*. Always feel that you are doing wrong when your time is passing unprofitably. Have some regularity and method on this subject. Endeavor to ascertain how much time should be devoted to your friends and to relaxation, and to let the remainder be all of it employed in the most useful manner you can devise. Never be satisfied with the man-

ner in which you are spending your time, if you can think of any possible way in which it might be more usefully employed.

Remember that time is the precious talent for which you must account to God, and if you find yourself indulging in listless inactivity, or tempted to engage in employments of no practical use, *remember your account to God. Be in a habit of inquiring when you commence any employment, "Is there anything I can do, more useful than this?"* And do not be satisfied till you have settled the question, that you are doing all the good you can.

16. Attempt by your efforts and example, to raise the standard of piety and activity. If all who are now commencing Christian life, should make this an object, and not fall into temptation which professed Christians so often set before the lambs of the flock, the church would indeed soon rise before the world, "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

Resolve to be an example to those who ought to be an example to you, and take the Bible, and the Bible only, for your guide in forming Christian character.

Be active in promoting all benevolent objects. Make it an object to prepare to lead with propriety in all social devotional duties. At this period, when prayer and effort must unite in hastening the great day of the Lord, let every young Christian learn to guide the devotions of others, as well as to lift up his own private supplication. There is nothing which so much promotes the "brotherly love" required in the Bible, and nothing which so much promotes union of effort and interest, as social prayer, and every one who commences religious

life, should aim to be prepared to perform such duties with propriety; and should stimulate others to engage in them.

17 Do not hesitate in the performance of all the *external* duties of a Christian, because you do not find satisfactory evidence that your *feelings* are right.

Religious duty consists of two parts—feeling and action—and because we find great deficiency in one respect, we surely ought not to neglect the whole. It is as unreasonable, as it would be not to attempt to *feel right* till every *external* duty was perfectly performed.

If we are dissatisfied with our evidence, let us go on and *do* everything that a Christian should do, as the most hopeful way to *produce* right *feelings*. We surely cannot hope to bring our hearts right by neglecting our outward duties.

Go forward then, and take a stand as an active Christian, and if your hearts are not right with God, you may be sure you are in less danger in taking this course than in neglecting it.

18. Remember that the principal duty of a Christian, as it respects others, is to excite them to the *immediate performance* of their religious duty.

Jesus Christ has instituted his church in the world, that through their instrumentality the perishing may be saved. There is no Christian but can find some *one* mind at least, over which he can have some influence, and if we can do *anything* to save others from eternal death, nothing should, for a moment, prevent our attempting it.

But to perform our duty faithfully in this respect, requires both discretion, and some knowledge derived from the experience of others. The follow-

ing hints, therefore, are added as the result of long experience and observation, and as a sort of guide to those who may be anxious to save a soul from death.

Let your *first* object be to persuade your friend to give an earnest and immediate attention to the subject. Serious remarks upon religion, do not produce much effect, unless some *direct object* is had in view. Endeavor to persuade your friends to *commence the daily reading of the Bible with prayer*. Show them that the Holy Spirit operates by means of the truths which we find in the Bible, and which are most forcibly presented to the mind in the solitude and solemnity of closet devotion. The character of the God we are commanded to love, can no more be perceived by a mind that is engrossed by other subjects and turned away from this, than the human eye can perceive the beauties of a picture, when it is not directed toward it. And as it is not only needful in beholding a picture, that light should shine upon it, but that the eye should be turned to it, so in order that the heart may be sanctified by the truth, is as needful that the mind should be turned toward it, as that the Holy Spirit should enlighten by his illuminating influences. Always then, in all your efforts, have this definite end in view, to persuade your friends to spend much time in studying the Bible with prayer.

When this object is secured, then urge the immediate duty of giving the affections of the heart to God. Show them that if they will only love God, they will then feel their guilt in refusing to obey him, and will greatly desire to live for his glory. If they will only love their God and

Saviour, they will feel that they can trust in the merits of his atoning blood. Do not, for a moment, allow them to feel that performing the outward duties of religion, is doing anything to recommend them to God, but is only a *means* of making them feel more deeply their immediate obligation to give the affections of their hearts to him, and of realizing the reasonableness of his holy law which requires it. Speak to them as if you really *felt* that there was no need of any delay, but that they could immediately perform what God requires; and in order to do this, endeavor to have a deep and realizing sense of this truth yourself. If they complain of their inability, or of the difficulty they find in performing their duty, show them that it is because they have so long forgotten and neglected these things, and formed such bad habits, that though it has really become difficult, it is a difficulty they have made for themselves, and which is an addition to their guilt. Show them that whatever the difficulty is, they can overcome it; for God never requires of his creatures what they cannot perform, and his standing, unalterable law is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." Remember always that the more clearly, constantly, and forcibly the truth is presented to any mind that will attend to it, the more hope there is that it will be obeyed.

One caution, however, needs to be added, and that is, that when it becomes apparent that the mind *will not* be brought to attend to the subject; when you find that the efforts become wearisome and unpleasant, always *cease for a while*, and wait for another time, or else you will do more harm than good. Persevering after this, will

only affect their minds with disgust and aversion toward a subject to which they have resolved they will not attend.

Another caution is also important. Always *speak kindly and affectionately* to friends upon this subject, and if you find all your efforts vain, though you cease to urge neglected duty, still continue to express the same kindness and interest for them. Do not give them occasion to feel that because they will not take your advice, you have cast them off as reprobates, and no longer desire their society. We may still continue to love the amiable natural traits of our friends, even though we find that they refuse to have them crowned and beautified by religion. Let all your efforts for the good of others be accompanied by earnest and constant prayer.

Lastly, do not be discouraged because you find that you are *very deficient in every one of the particulars specified*.

Remember that Christian life is a *warfare*, and that it is only at the *end* that we are to come off conquerors and more than conquerors. Remember that He whom you are striving to serve and please, is not a hard master. Though you have been inexcusable in forming such inveterate habits of sin, and all the difficulties you find are of your own making, yet he can be "touched with the feeling of your infirmities." When He sees that you really are afflicted because you so constantly abuse and forget him, he pities you as a father pitieth his children; and so long as you use the means he has appointed to keep you from sin, and wait upon him for strength and guidance, he will never leave nor forsake you. When you feel your own strength and resolution failing, go to

him who hath said, "my grace is sufficient for thee, and my strength shall be made perfect in weakness." Call upon him, "and he will be very gracious unto the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee. And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, this is the way, walk ye therein, when ye turn to the right and when ye turn to the left." Remember, also, that the conflict is short; the race will speedily be accomplished—soon your deficiencies and guilt shall pain you no more—soon you shall "see him as he is," and "awake in his likeness and be satisfied therewith."

RESOLUTIONS OF REV. JONATHAN EDWARDS, D. D.

BEING sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to his will, for Christ's sake.

REMEMBER TO READ OVER THESE RESOLUTIONS ONCE A WEEK.

1st. That I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit, and pleasure, in the whole of my duration, without any consideration of the time, whether now or never so many myriads of ages hence. Resolved to do whatever I think to be my duty, and most for the good advantage of mankind in general. Resolved to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many and how great soever. 2d. To be continually endeavoring to find out some new invention and contrivance to promote the fore-mentioned things. 3d. Never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God; nor be, nor suffer it, if I can avoid it. 4th. Never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can. 5th. To live with all my might, while I do live. 6th. Never to do anything which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life. 7th. To think much on all occasions, of my own dying, and of the common circumstances which

attend death. 8th. When I think of any theorem in divinity to be solved, immediately to do what I can toward solving it, if circumstances do not hinder. 9th. To be endeavoring to find out fit objects of charity and liberality.

10th. Never to do anything out of revenge. 11th. Never to suffer the least motions of anger to irrational beings. 12th. That I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die. 13th. To live so at all times, as I think is best in my devout frames, and when I have clearest notions of things of the Gospel, and another world. 14th. To maintain the strictest temperance in eating and drinking. 15th. Never to do anything, which, if I should see in another, I should count a just occasion to despise him for, or to think any way the more meanly of him. 16th. Whenever I can do any conspicuously evil action, to trace it back, till I come to the original cause; and then both carefully endeavor to do so no more, and to fight and pray with all my might against the original of it. 17th. To study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly, and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same. 18th. To strive to my utmost every week to be brought higher in religion, and to a higher exercise of grace, than I was the week before. 19th. To be strictly and firmly faithful to my trust, that that in Prov. xx, 6, *a faithful man who can find?* may not be partly fulfilled in me.

20th. Always to do what I can toward making, maintaining, and establishing peace, when it can be without over-balancing detriment in other respects. 21st. In narrations never to speak anything but the pure and simple verity. 22d. Never to speak evil of any, except I have some particular good call for it. 23d. To inquire every night, as I am going to bed, wherein I have been negligent, what sin I have committed, and wherein I have denied myself; also at the end of every week, month, and year. 24th. Never to speak anything that is ridiculous, or matter of laughter on the Lord's day. 25th. Never to do anything that I so much question the lawfulness of, as that I intend, at the same time, to consider and examine afterward, whether it be lawful or no: except I as much question the lawfulness of the omission. 26th. To ask myself at the end of every day, week, month, and year, wherein I could possibly in any respect have done better. 27th. Frequently to renew the dedication of myself to God, which was made

at my baptism ; which I solemnly renewed when I was received into the communion of the Church ; and which I have solemnly re-made this 12th day of January, 1722-3. 28th. Never henceforward, till I die, to act as if I were any way my own, but entirely and altogether God's ; agreeable to what is to be found in Saturday, January 12. 29th. Never to allow the least measure of any fretting uneasiness at my father or mother. Resolved to suffer no effects of it, so much as in the least alteration of speech, or motion of my eye : and to be especially careful of it, with respect to any of our family. .

30th. Constantly, with the utmost niceness and diligence, and the strictest scrutiny, to be looking into the state of my soul, that I may know whether I have truly an interest in Christ or no ; that when I come to die, I may not have any negligence respecting this to repent of. 31st. I will act so as I think I shall judge would have been best and most prudent, when I come into the future world. 32d. I frequently hear persons in old age say how they would live, if they were to live their lives over again : Resolved, that I will live just so as I can think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age. 33d. Whenever I hear anything spoken in conversation of any person, if I think it would be praiseworthy in me, Resolved to endeavor to imitate it. 34th. To endeavor to my utmost, to act as I can think I should do, if I had already seen the happiness of heaven, and hell torments. 35th. Never to give over, nor in the least to slacken my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be. 36th. When I fear misfortunes and adversities, to examine whether I have done my duty, and resolve to do it ; and let it be just as Providence orders it, I will, as far as I can, be concerned about nothing but my duty, and my sin. 37th. Never to do anything but duty ; and then, according to Eph. vi, 6, 7, 8, do it willingly and cheerfully, as unto the Lord, and not to man ; knowing that whatever good thing any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord. 38th. Very much to exercise myself in this all my life long, viz: with the greatest openness I am capable of, to declare my ways to God, and lay open my soul to him : all my sins, temptations, difficulties, sorrows, fears, hopes, desires, and everything, and every circumstance, according to Dr. Manton's 27th sermon on the 119th Psalm. 39th. After afflictions, to inquire, what I am the better for them, what good I have got by them, and what I might have got by them.



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Baxter, Richard

Directions for getting and keeping spiritual peace and comfort

Cincinnati [ca. 1860]

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